

The Art of Tamilnadu

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Introduction :

The history of art in Tamilnad dates back from the Sangam age, about the first centuries of the Christian era. Long before this Jaina ascetics had fashioned shelters for themselves among the hills, but these are scarcely works of art. The Sangam poems speak of a well developed state of architecture and sculpture. But not a relic of it all has survived because it was all made of perishable materials. It is with the Pallavas and the Pandyas, about the beginning of the seventh century A.D., that the history of art, strictly so regarded, commences. The two dynasties fashioned a number of excavations in the rock. The more versatile Pallavas added monolithic temples and "frescoes in stone" to their repertoire. They also built temples of stone.

The imperial Cholas continued their tradition, but in a great and magnificent style. They built innumerable temples, particularly in Tanjore and Tiruchi districts. Four of these are superb, those at Tanjore, Gangaikondacholapuram, Darasuram and Tribhuvanam. After the decline of the Cholas in the 13th century, the Pandyas took up the tale. They built few new temples, but added considerably to existing ones. Their principal example is the Sri Minakshi temple at Madurai.

The Vijayanagar emperors, who ruled the Tamil districts from the 14th to 17th centuries, were equally large builders. They specialised in erecting "gopuras". There are splendid examples at Chidambaram, Kanchi and Thiruvannamalai. Their feudatories, the Nayaks of Madurai, patronised a rich and florid art. They added largely to the Madurai temple. Their handiwork is prominent in temples in the far south. Portrait and pillar sculpture flourished greatly.

The art of Tamilnad has been equally rich in sculpture, painting and bronze casting. The history of sculpture, from the Pallava times to the Nayak, is the story of a modest, but beautiful, art which developed into the Chola magnificence, as in the great temples at Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram. Bronze casting also dates from Pallava times. But the art reached its height under the Cholas. It was then that the superb images of Lord Nataraja, so majestic and magnificent, were produced. The style made little headway after the Cholas.

Tamil painting is one of the oldest of the arts practised. It is mentioned in Sangam literature. It developed under the Pallavas as a sensitive and gentle art, and under the Cholas as large and magnificent. The art flourished in Vijayanagar and Nayak times too. This, in brief, is the history of religious art in Tamilnad.

Early temples:

The earliest temples in Tamilnad were built of wood or brick, and had tiled roofs. In some of the important temples, the tiles were covered with sheets of copper. The Nataraja shrine at Chidambaram (Fig. 1) preserves this archaic form. A fresco of the 11th Century A.D, shows the shrine as it is found today. It is erected on a basement of stone, and wooden pillars support the tiled roof. As the tiles are covered with gold-gilded copper plates, the shrine is called "the golden hall" or *Ponnambalam* in Tamil.

The term, *ambalam*, standing for a temple, is commonly used in Kanyakumari district of Tamilnad and the adjoining Kerala State, where the temples have tiled roofs (Figs. 3 and 4). The metal tiles are often simple in appearance and rectangular in shape. In some cases, however, they are ornamental. Some of the temples have two or three tiers (Figs. 6a and b).

Pious kings sometimes covered the tiles of a shrine roof with gold. This was what many Chola kings did at Chidambaram. This practice was followed even in some temples built of brick or stone. Examples are the Alagarkovil (Fig. 2) and the Srirangam (Fig 3) temples.

Cave temples:

The Pallavas excavated a large number of temples in hill sides in the northern part of Tamilnad, and their contemporaries, the Pandyas, in the southern. At about the same time, the Adigamans a minor dynasty ruling in Salem and Dharmapuri district, created two remarkable "cave" temples at Namakkal, in Salem district.

These temples are of many kinds. Some are simple in plan, just an excavation in rock. But many are more advanced, with the sanctum at the centre and passages around Most are rectangular pillared halls with the sanctum attached to the hind wall But sometimes the sanctums are located in the middle of the hall or attached to the lateral walls.

The excavated temples are modelled on pillared pavilions, called *mandapas*, which have survived in many parts of Tamilnad. They were used to hold festivals in, to expound the scriptures in and as meeting places of the village assemblies. There is epigraphical evidence for the third kind of use at Uttaramerur, about twenty miles from Kanchipuram.

The earliest of the Pallavas to e vate rock temples was Mahendravarman I (590-630). His "cave" temples are found from near Kanchipuram in the north to Tiruchi, on the Kaviri, in the south. Inscriptions in a number of these excavations carry his honorifics, or *birudas*. That at Mandagapattu, believed to be the earliest says that Mahendra created the temple without the use of wood, brick, metal or mortar. The finest of Mahendra's "cave" temples is undoubtedly that at Tiruchi. It has a remarkable sculpture of Lord Siva.

Narasimhavarman II, surnamed Rajasimha (690-720), has left the largest number of monuments among the Pallavas. He is the author of all the monuments at Mamallapuram, some 30 miles south of Madras on the coast, which was the main seaport of the Pallavas.

The "cave" temples of Narasimhavarman show a wide variety of form. The most notable of them, at Mamallapuram, are the Mahishamardhini "cave", the Varaha "cava" (Fig 7b), the Adivaraha "cave" and the Trimurthi "cave". On their walls are sculptures in the finest style Pallava art ever attained, particularly the first named, where there are two large panels, one depicting Goddess Durga slaying the demon, a model of energy and vigour, and the other Lord Vishnu in His cosmic sleep.

About four miles north of Mahabalipuram, also on the coast, at Saluvankuppam Narasimha created two other "cave" temples, one of which is called the "Tiger's Cave" (Fig. 7a). It has a string of heads of mythical monsters called Yalis around it. It is a remarkable creation, though unfinished.

In south Tamilnad, near Madurai, there is a "cave" temple excavated by the Pandyas in, judging from an inscription found there, the sixth century A.D. and, therefore, earlier than the Pallava creations. This is at Pillayarpatti and it has three sculptures. A few miles nearby is another excavation at the base of a hill, at Kunrakudi. There is a third at Tirugokarnam, a suburb of Pudukkottah.

To the next century, the seventh, are to be assigned an excavation at Thirumayam, near Pudukottah, dedicated to both Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. They are now separate temples, but once they were one. Near Madurai in the reign of the great Pandya king, Parantaka Nedunjadayan, were created "cave" temples at Tiruparankunram (Fig 59) and in the Anamalai hills. The Pandya ruled in the eighth century.

The style ended in the ninth century in Tamilnad with a few creations near Pudukkottah. At Narttamalai, in the reign of Dantivarman a later, Pallava king, a local chieftain excavated two shrines.

It should be understood that the usual parts of the structural temple, as evolved in later times, were erected in front of the original excavated shrine in a number of cases, which are under worship. The temple at Tiruparakunram is a celebrated one, a living centre of faith.

Most of the "cave" temples enshrined Hindu Deities, principally Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. A few were Jaina. No "cave" temple dedicated to Lord Budda has been discovered in Tamilnad so far.

Monolithic Temples:

The Pallavas introduced a unique style at Mamallapuram. They created temples out of standing rocks which are free standing. The celebrated Five temples (Fig. 8) are of great importance for the study of Hindu art in Tamilnad. Not only is there no other example of this school (except one in the Pandya districts, noticed below), but they preserve the forms which were used in pre-Pallava times, as in the Sangam age, but which have disappeared because they were made of perishable materials like wood or brick.

The "rathas" a name given not very appropriately by the early European archaeologists, were created out of two small rocky eminences, about half a mile from the sea, at Mamallapuram. The larger of the two sloped from south to north, and the other lay to its west. The ingenious Pallava artists created four temples out of the first eminence and a fifth out of the second. From north to south are the Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna and Draupadi *rathas*, with the Sahadeva *ratha* nearby.

The biggest of the five is the Dharmaraja ratha. It is of three storeys, with a sanctum in each. It carries some lovely sculptures, a few of which may be human portraits. It is dedicated to Lord Siva and is called "Atyantakama Pallavesvara Grham" in its inscriptions. "Atyantakama" was one of the honorifics of King Narasimhavarman II.

Immediately to its north is a powerful looking monument called the Bhima ratha. It has a huge barrel vault, and was designed to enshrine a recumbent form of Lord Vishnu. It has neither sculptures nor inscriptions.

The Arjuna ratha, the third in the row, is a replica of the first, the Dharmaraja ratha. It is a lovely little monument with some tender sculptures. It is of two storeys and there is a small hall in front of the sanctum.

Next to it is the Draupadi ratha, simple and hut shaped. It was dedicated to Goddess Durga. There are some sculptures on its walls The roof is like that of huts which are still being built in this part of the country.

Standing alongside, but seperated by an elephant, is the Sahadeva ratha, (fig. 9a) a temple with an apsidal tower, of the same shape as the elephant.

There are four other monoliths in Mamallapuram, One, called the Ganesa ratha, is a beautiful, rather elaborately ornamented monument. It is rectangular on plan. The three others, standing in a row, the twin Pidari rathas and the Valayankuttai ratha, are much less finished than the other monuments in Mamallapuram.

The monoliths prefigure later structural temples of stone. The final of the Dharmaraja and Arjuna "rathas" foreshadows the "*vimanas*" of later times, while that of Bhima "ratha" anticipates the "gopuras". The monoliths also preserve in rock the temple forms that were followed before the Pallavas arrived on the scene.

All these monoliths were created by King Narasimhavarman II. Two bear his inscriptions and are named after him.

Rock architecture reached its height in the Kailasa temple at Ellora, created by the Rashtrakutas in the ninth century. The Pandyas made an attempt at Kalugumalai, (fig. 60 & 61) in Tirunelveli District. This monolith has been created out of a piece of a hill which has been separated. Though unfinished, it carries some superb sculptures.

Structural temples:

As rock architecture was nearing its term in Tamilnad, the structural temple, that is, one built of brick or stone, was making its appearance. While no brick temple definitely earlier than the eigth century has been found, there is at Kuram, near Kanchipuram, a stone temple built in the seventh century. It was followed by three built by Narasimhavarman II Pallava at Mahabalipuram, the celebrated Shore Temple, (fig. 9b) the Mukunda Nayanar, and the Olakkanesvara, and a fourth at Panamalai.

But the most famous of Narasimhavarman's structural temple is the Kailasanatha at Kanchi (fig. 10). It also seems to be the earliest. The shrine is set in the midst of walls which are composed of little chapels, on a few of which there are survivals of Pallava paintings. The king's son added a smaller shrine in front of the main shrine (fig. 11a). Coeval with the original building are a series of little shrines erected outside the temple walls (fig. 11b). The disposition of the images follows closely the rules laid down in the texts which govern the building of temples. The model was followed in another temple at Tirupattur, near Tiruchi.

Nandivarman II the second successor of Narasimhavarman, built the Vaikuntanatha temple at Kanchi. The sanctum is on three floors, each with an enshrined deity. Around the walls are sculptures which seem to narrate the history of the Pallavas. The third great temple of Pallavas, the Sundaravarada at Uttaramerur a place which attracts attention because it was laid out on town planning principles (as, indeed, Kanchi too was), has its main shrine built of stone, but the rest is of brick.

Towards the end of their rule, the Pallavas abandoned sandstone as material for their temples and chose granite. These temples, like those at Tiruttani and Alambakkam, have little sculptures on the exterior.

The Pandyas, contemporaries of the Pallavas in the south, also built a number of temples, but none has survived.

The Cholas, who re-established their supremecy in south Indian politics about 850 A. D., were pious kings and great builders. Their first attempts, all in granite, are in the Pudukottah region. A temple named after Vijayalaya, the founder of the new dynasty, is at Narttamalai, already mentioned. Vijayalaya's son Aditya I, is said in an inscription to have built tall stone temples to Lord Siva along the banks of the Kaviri. A number of these temples have survived.

They are comparatively small in size, but of beautiful proportions. Their sculptural wealth is considerable. The notable temples of these times are the Nagesvara at Kumbakonam, the Koranganatha at Srinivasanallur, the Siva temple at Pullamangai, near Tanjore, and the twin temples at Paluvur (fig. 12)

Aditya's successor, Parantaka I, who reigned for almost half a century, was another notable builder. The temples of his times belong to the same idiom as those of his father's, but they are rather less elaborate. This style held good untill Rajaraja I came to the Chola throne in 985.

Perhaps the most important monument of this school is the Muvarkoil at Kodumbalur (fig. 13), of which the third has disappeared except for its basement. It was built by Bhuti, an Irukkuvel chieftain.

The Chola temples of the tenth century are modest in their proportions some 30 feet high on an avarage, Most are of stone from bottom to top. A few, however, are of stone upto the ceiling, the superstructure being of brick and mortar. On plan these temples have square, octagonal and circular tops. Small panels of stories from the Ramayana and the lives of the Saivaite saints adorn the basements. Portraits of the builders are found in a few of the temples.

Rajaraja I caused a revolution. The greatest of the Chola emperors (985-1014), Rajaraja epitomised, as it were, the spirit of his magnificent and spacious age in the mighty temple of Lord Rajarajesvara his capital (fig. 15). It seems to have been modelled on the Virattanesvara temple at Tiruvadigai (fig. 14), a Pallava foundation of the seventh century, which was restored in the ninth.

The great temple at Tanjore is built entirely of granite, a stone not found within miles of Tanjore. The tower over the sanctum, about 200 feet high, is the largest in Tamilnad. There is much for the engineer to admire in this structure of the middle ages.

Rajaraja's son and successor, Rajendra I, emulated his father, though it was a stupendous task. At his new capital of Gangaikondacholapuram, he built the temple of Lord Gangaikondacholisvara (Fig. 16) The tower over the sanctum is only slightly smaller than that at Tanjore. Many of the sculptures on the walls, particularly the one which depicts Lord Siva honouring a saint, are superb.

Two other mighty temples were built by the successors of Rajendra. The second Rajaraja erected the Rajarajesvaram at Darasuram and the third Kulottunga the Tribhuvanaviresvara temple at Tribhuvanam, (Fig. 17) both places near Kumbakonam.

The distinguishing mark of these temples is their huge towers over the sanctum. Following a correct artistic principle, they dwarf the tower at the gate. But later times reversed the order. The future, strangely enough, belonged to the entrance towers.

Gopuras:

The towers at entrances to the temples, called "gopuras", are superficially the distinctive mark of religious architecture in Tamilnad. These towers, some of which are over 150 feet high, dominate the landscape. Their beginnings are to be traced to the Sangam age. Poems of that period speak of towers, but often as having been erected over fort and palace walls. There are glowing accounts of some of these structures. Not a trace of any of them has survived. But some temples in Kanyakumari district seem to preserve the old features. Figure 18 depicts the features of the old "gopuras", which became an ornamental adjunct in course of time (Fig. 19). The earliest "gopura" to survive is at the Kailasanatha temple, in Kanchipuram. (Fig. 21) In fact, there are two of them, one in front and the other at the back. Both are small structures, overshadowed by the other kind of tower in Hindu temples, that over the sanctum, called the "vimana". The practice of building two "gopuras" fell into desuetude, to be revived magnificently in later times, when four were built in the principal temples. The "gopuras" of the early Chola temples at Paluvur are built of stone in the lower portion and of mortar in the superstructure. Usually, the upper part is constructed of brick, with the sculptures which adorn the tiers made of a substance called "sudai", which has been in use from ancient times in Tamilnad. Two entrance towers, one behind the other, were constructed in the four mighty Chola temples, at Tanjore, Gangaikondacholapuram, Darasuram and Tribhuvanam, one of the many features which distinguish these structures from others. The twin towers are intact at Tanjore and Tribhuvanam. Those at Tanjore called the "Rajarajan tiruvasal" (Fig. 20) and "Keralantakan tiruvasal" are handsome structures. The Chola age also witnessed the construction of four "gopuras" in each of the cardinal directions. There are splendid examples at Chidambaram. Inscriptions there speak of "seven-tiered gopuras". These towers are of stone upto the ceiling and then onwards of brick. The upper and lower courses of the stone part of the "gopuras" provided the Chola sculptors with niches in which they installed some of their best productions. As a rule, the major Deities are placed in the upper courses and the minor ones in the lower. (fig. 24). It was a custom to carve dance poses near the door jambs of the "gopuras". Those at Chidambaram are deservedly famous. In the times of the

third Kulottunga, about the turn of the thirteenth century, a popular motif was men on rearing horses. The sedent lion was also often carved. With the advent of the Vijayanagar emperors the emphasis was on height. Many "gopuras" are associated with Krishnadevaraya, and they are called " Rayagopuras ". In Nayak times were constructed the splendid " gopuras " in the Madurai temple (fig. 29).

Other parts :

Throughout the ages the ceilings of temples have provided the Hindu artist with an opportunity to produce attractive and striking carvings. There are a few examples in the temples of Tamilnad. Figure 31 shows a sixteenth century production, a tableau of parrots pecking at lotus petals. This is in the Srimushnaṁ temple, erected in Nayak times. A century later, in the Adikesava temple, at Tiruvattar (Kanyakumari district) was created a striking panel of the nine planets, the " Navagrahas ". (fig. 32). The zodiac appears on a ceiling in a Pollachi temple, belonging to the twelfth century. (fig 33). Pillared pavilions, called " mandapas " are a common feature of Tamilnad temples. There are many varities of these. The part of the temple immediately in front of the sanctum is called " ardha ", that next to it " mukha " and, in the bigger temples, that next to the second " maha ". These were built in a line with the sanctum. In later times pavilions were added near the temple, to be used to celebrate festivals or to hold scriptural recitations in. The best examples are at Kanchipuram, Vellore and Madurai. These have 100 or 1,000 pillars. Figures 46 and 47 are of rather less well known examples. The " mandapa " in the Thiruvattar temple (Fig. 46) carries a large number of pillars each with a sculpture of a woman carrying a lamp, and that in the Tirunelveli temple (Fig. 47) shows rearing " yalis " which are mythical beasts. The pillar in the Tamilnad temple is often of exquisite beauty. From early times it attracted the skill of the sculptor. Five examples, all belonging to later ages, are illustrated in this book. Fig. 42 is of a pillar with liturgical significance Called the " Garuda stambha ", it stands in front of the Srimushnam temple of the Nayak times. It carries a miniature shrine on top. From the celebrated Tirunelveli temple (Fig 41) comes a tour de force, a whole pillar wrought in the form of a " gopura ". Inside the temple is depicted a pillar with the motif of rider and rearing horse (Fig. 39) Fig. 38 and 40 are of two superb examples with the same motif. The first comes from the 100-pillar mandapa in the temple of Sri Varadaraja, in Kanchipuram, a fine example of Vijayanagar art, and the second from the celebrated "Horse Court" in the Srirangam temple, created in the 17th century, a century later than the first example. The walls enclosing the temple complex, called "prakara" walls, have evolved with the times An early example is a curious one and has not been imitated since. Fig. 45 a shows the " prakara " walls of the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, made up of a number of small shrines. On the outside (Fig. 44a) these walls carry sculptures of horse and rider. Belonging to a much more usual type is that of the Srirangam temple (Fig. 44b). Some of the bigger temples had their

" prakara " walls built in two storeys, as at Gangaikondacholapuram (fig. 45 b). The Hindu artists fastened upon many areas in a temple in which to create sculptures. The niche of the shrine is an obvious choice. From the ninth century, the early Chola period, comes figure 35 a, showing a lintel depicting mythical crocodiles. Sporting figures people the base of the Kailasanatha temple (fig. 35 b) and dancers that of the Chidambaram temple (fig. 36). From the Chidambaram temple also comes the majestic elephant (fig 37).

Sculpture :

Sculpture in Tamilnad, like many other branches of its art, dates back to the Sangam age. The poems preserve interesting descriptions of sculpture in bronze, wood, ivory and stucco. In particular, stucco art flourished. But not a single piece of early sculpture has survived.

The history of the art begins in about the sixth century A.D. under the Pallavas. The earliest examples are panels (figs. 48 & 49) found embedded in the Tantonrisvara temple at Kanchipuram. Mostly representations of dances performed by men and women in pairs or in groups, they closely resemble the late productions at Amaravati which, at a certain stage of their history, was under the Pallavas.

Essentially, however, it was the art of the stucco worker that became transformed into the art of the stone sculptor under the Pallavas. Sculptures were caved at the site on the walls of the exacavated " caves " and monoliths and structural temples at Mamallapuram (fig. 50), Kanchipuram (fig. 51a & b) and elsewhere. These sculptures were covered with stucco and painted over.

Some of the greatest Hindu sculptures of all time are at Mamallapuram. On the walls of the Mahishamardhini " cave ", facing each other, are two large panels, that on the northern wall depicting Goddess Durga slaying the demon (fig. 53) and that on the southern Lord Vishnu in His cosmic sleep (fig. 52). The two represent entirely different situations, but the Pallava sculptor was so versatile that he could make his depiction of fiery energy and calm quiescence equally memorable. It looks as if the two productions were created opposite each other to show the artist's mastery of vigour and peace

In all the wide range of Hindu art the much large " fresco in stone ", depicting Arjuna's penance, an episode from the " Mahabharatha ", is unique (fig. 54 & 55). The artists selected a portion of the face of a hill with a cleft approximately midway, to create a scene from the life of ancient India. The centre of attraction is a man performing austere penance. Near him stands a God. Turning towards them in both directions are large groups of semi-divine beings, animals, and birds. The cleft probably ran with actual water. This sculpture is one of the greatest achievements of the Hindu. It has been imitated a

few yards nearby on the same face of the hill, but the work was not completed.

Loose sculptures are not met with until we come to the eighth century A.D. A sculpture of Manmatha and Rathi at Uttaramerur (fig. 56) is in the idiom of this century.

There are few sculptures of the early ninth century under the Pallavas. Those that are available retain the style of the earlier century. The best examples are in the temples of Tiruttani and Takkolam.

The sculptural art of the early Pandyas is to be found mainly on rock, in the excavated temples and at the monolith at Kalugumalai, already referred to. Its style is essentially that of the Pallava art of the seventh and eighth centuries, but there are some regional variations (figs. 57 & 58).

Some of the best Pandya work is at Tiruparankunram (fig. 59) and at Tirumayam, near Pudukottai. It is, however, at Kalugumalai (figs 60 & 61) that the high reaches of Pandya art are to be met with.

About the same time as the early Pandyas, the Atiya chieftains, celebrated in Sangam literature, fostered a provincial school. In the two excavated temples at Namakkal there are some spirited renderings of Lord Vushnu's incarnations (fig. 62 63 & 64).

The early Chola temples at Srinivasanallur (fig 65), Kumbakonam (fig. 65 b) and Pullamangai bear sculptures that, while retaining many of the Pallava features, gradually acquire signs of the newly rising art of the Cholas. The sculpture was no longer carved at the site, but made elsewhere and fitted into the framework of architecture. This period has contributed many excellent portrait sculptures There is a number of them in the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam (fig. 67a,b).

To the period which immediately followed, when the influence of that remarkable queen, Sembian Mahadevi, was potent, belong some exquisite sculpture (fig 69).

A great sculptural age begins with the building of the Big Temple at Tanjore. The architecture of that magnificent building rather overshadows the sculptures on its walls, and yet these figure carvings are full of spirit and energy, fit symbol of the Chola state. Even more remarkable are the sculptures in the Gangaikondacholapuram. They mark the zenith of the Chola sculptural art.

They are set in big niches on the walls of the temple. The carvings seem to burst with life out of their frames. Yet many of them have tender themes. The greatest masterpiece of them all depicts Lord Siva winding a garland of victory around the head of a devotee (fig. 71). There is an ineffable smile on the face of the Lord as he dances away in another composition (fig. 70 a).

In the 12th century Chola sculpture becomes graceful. The best examples are in the temples of Chidambaram, Kumbakonam (fig. 75 & 76) Darasuram (fig. 73 and 74 a) and Tribhuvanam(fig. 74 b).

The advent of Vijayanagar and Nayak rule introduced Hoysala and Kakatiya influences. The sculptures at Madurai (figs. 77, 78), Suchindram (fig. 79) and other places are usually tall, with an emphasis on angularity. The figures are heavily ornamented.

A little apart from the mainstream of Tamilnad sculpture is the school in the Kanyakumari temples like Tiruvattar (fgs. 82, 83, 84). It was influenced by the art of the neighbouring Kerala State.

Bronzes :

Bronze images were known in the Sangam age, but the earliest to survive are Pallava. These are very few.

The bronzes of Tamilnad were usually made by the ancient process called "cire perdue". The subject was first modelled in wax. It was then coated with clay. A mould was then created by melting the wax. Into the mould liquid metal was poured to cast a solid image. The process was different in producing hollow images. The subject would be first modelled in clay. The core would then be coated with wax and the wax covered with a "negative" of clay. After the wax was drained out by heating, the "negative" was used for casting.

There are some Pallava bronzes of superb beauty, some of which are illustrated in this book. Vadakkalathur was a centre of a great school. An early Chola tradition was rooted in Thiruvengadu and at Paruthiyur. The Vrshavahana image from Tiruvenkadu (fig. 98) is a masterpiece. But there are many others

The splendour of Chola bronzes shines from the images of Lord Nataraja which Chola casters created in numbers. It is these images which have carried the reputation of Hindu art to the four corners of the world. The Thiruvalangadu Nataraja captivated the attention of Rodin, the great French sculptor. There is a superb bronze of Lord Kartikeya at Gangaikondacholapuram.

The bronzes of the late Pandyas, the Vijayanagar emperors and the Nayaks may be said to belong to a common school. The emphasis is on ornamentation.

Painting :

The history of painting in Tamilnad begins about the eighth century A.D., but the art was much older. It was widely practised in the Sangam age. However, not a line of the large corpus has survived. The earliest survivals are on the walls of Pallava temples. As a rule, the monuments, whether excavated or

structural, were painted over. Patches of colour are still clinging to some of the monuments at Mamallapuram.

On the walls of the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, that fundamental record in south Indian art history, are some paintings. Florai and geometrical designs were painted in some of the little shrines that make up the "prakara" walls, and some of them have been painstakingly restored. In the Panamalai temple, built in the same reign as the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi, that is, Narasimhavarman II's there is a superb portrait of Goddess Bhavani (fig. 109). This is all that has come down to us of what must have been a very large body of paintings.

As could be expected, Pallave paintings have the same qualities as Pallava sculpture. They are dainty, graceful and pleasing. They do not aim at astounding the beholder. They appeal rather to his sense of appropriateness, of neatness. Pallava paintings do not put a foot wrong, so to say. Everything is as it should be. But it is far from prim. It has a life of its own, the life of the religion the personalities of which it depicts.

In the next century, the ninth, were painted perhaps the best known of the Tamilnad paintings. These are at an excavated "cave" temple at Sittannavasal, near Pudukottah. The excavation and the paintings on its ceilings and pillars used to be attributed to the Pallavas, but a later discovery of an inscription on the monument shows that the work should be attributed to the Pandyas.

The paintings here (figs. 110 and 111) illustrate a passage from the Jain scripture and a dancing damsel. Figure 111 depicts a part of a large composition, on the ceiling of the "ardha mandapa", of a big lotus pool in which a few persons are gathering lotus flowers. Some elephants are sporting in the waters, and fish swim about. It is a very natural scene. On one of the pillars of the same hall there is a lovely little painting of the danseuse.

In the far south, at Tirumalaipuram, there are some other paintings of the Pandya period. They depict some geometrical patterns and some birds. As in the case of the Pallavas, the survivals of Pandya paintings are pitifully few.

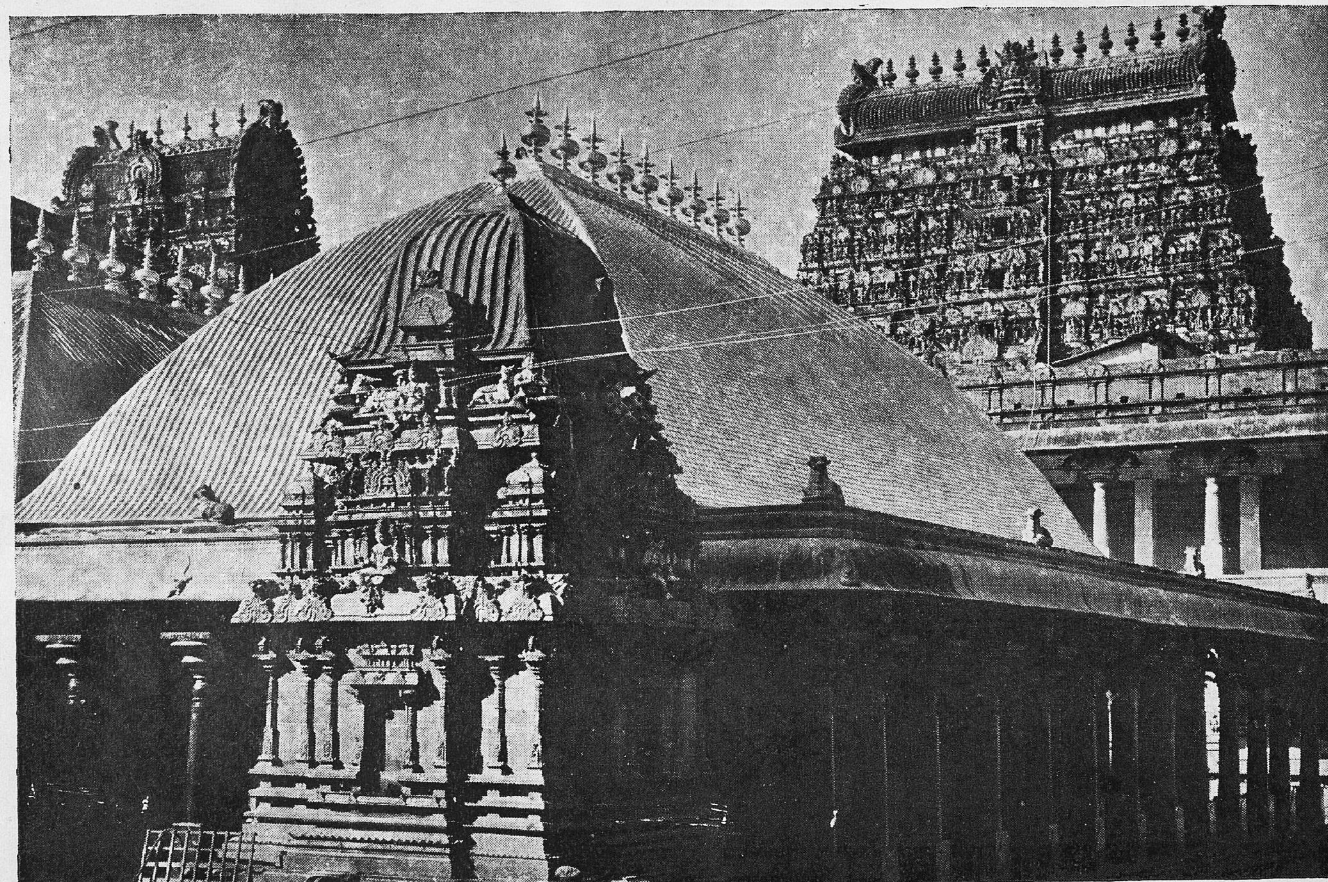
Chola architecture made a tentative start with the small temples in the Pudukottah region, and it is in the biggest and most important of them that the earliest Chola paintings, a school later to become a glory of Hindu art, have been found. On the walls of the temple named Vijaya'aya Cholisvaram some paintings have survived There is a big panel of Lord Bhairava.

The zenith of the plastic art of the Cholas is reached, appropriately enough, in the Big Temple at Tanjore. Around the sanctum was painted a virtual gallery of Chola belief and manners The paintings are usually of large size, and they deal with large themes. Four of them are reproduced in this book. (figs. 112 to 115).

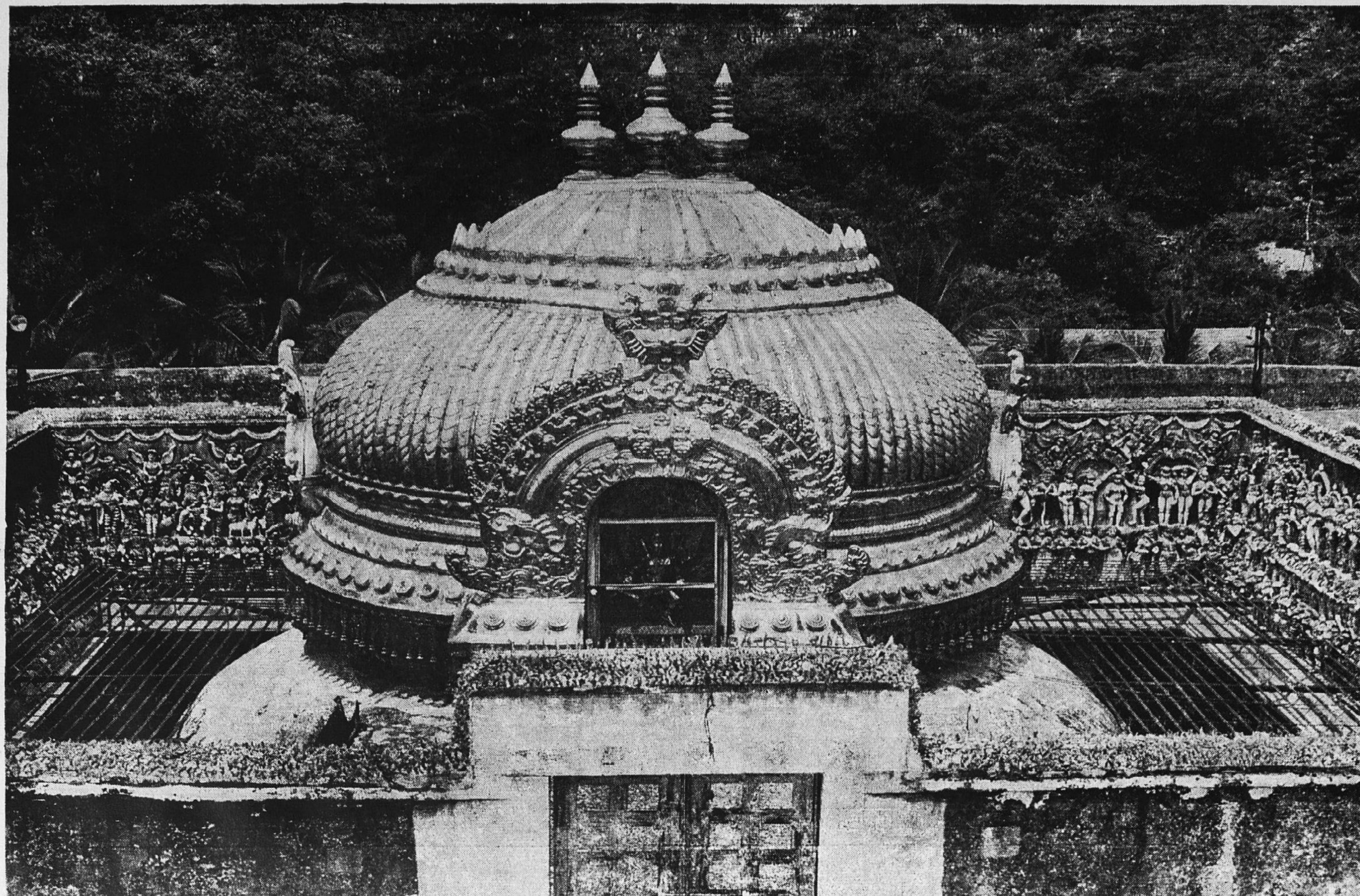
The paintings illustrate incidents from the Hindu scriptures and legends Fig. 115 is of a saint, Sundara, who is believed to have travelled on horse-back to Mount Kailas along with another saint, Cheraman Perumal, on an elephant In fig. 113 (and also on the cover page) is depicted Rajaraja I, the builder of the temple, in conversation with his preceptor. This painting is one of a few in which the great king is drawn There is another painting of him in the temple, in which he is shown as worshipping at the Shrine of Lord Nataraja in the Chidambaram temple. Incidentally, the paintings depict scenes from Chola life. Fig. 114 is particularly interesting, showing as it does servitors clothed in what seem to be modern "bush shirts". Fig. 112 is of a dancing girl, a subject very popular with Chola sculptors and painters.

In Nayak times these Chola paintings were overlaid with a layer of comtemporary work. This practice of painting over older work, disastrous as it seems to us, used to be fairly common. A comparatively larger body of paintings of later times of the Vijayanagar and Nayak Kings has survived. Fig 116, from the Madurai temple, is a representative example. On the walls of this temple is a large series of paintings depicting scenes from Lord Siva's sports at Madurai, the subject of a celebrated Tamil book. There are also examples of Nayak paintings in the Chidambaram temple.

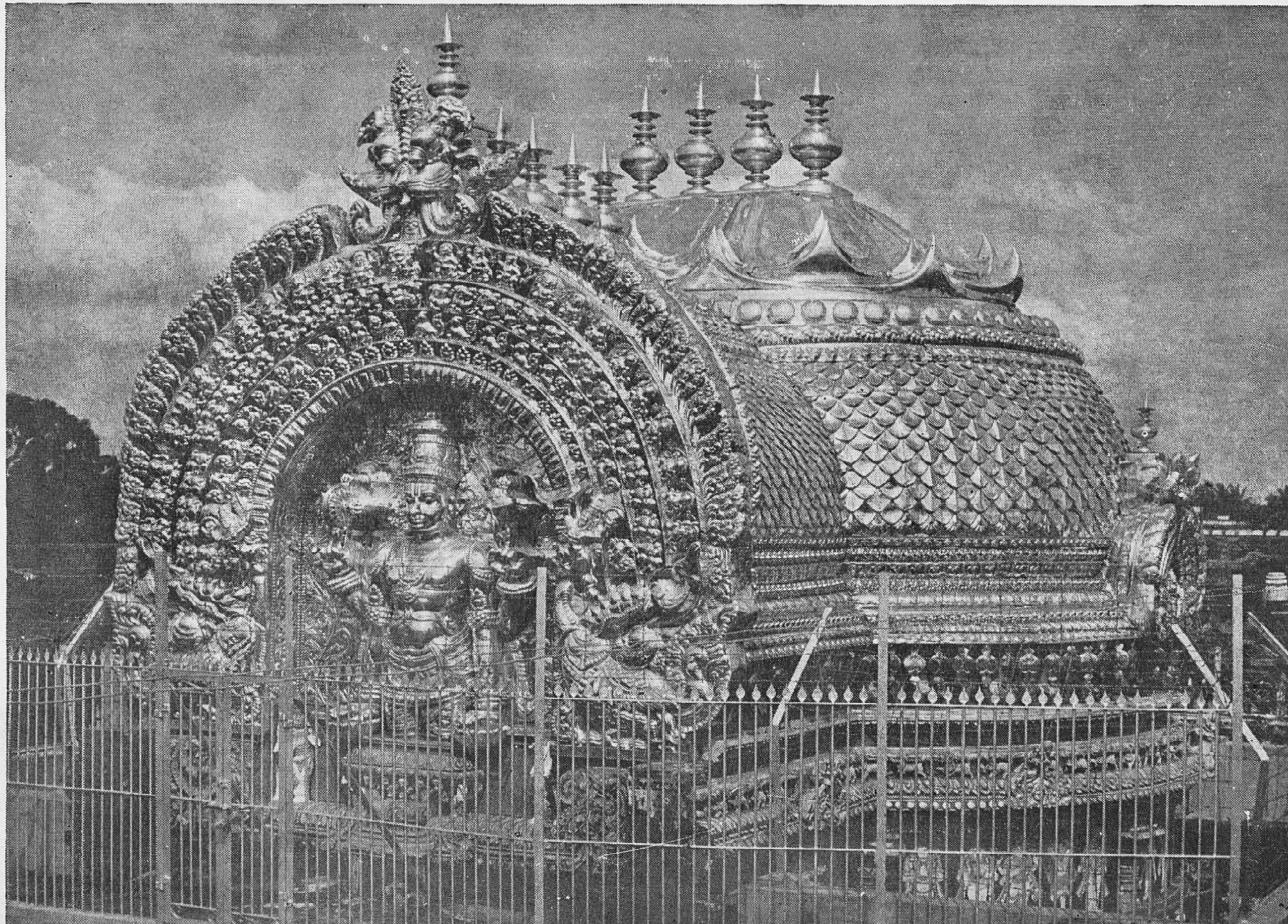
Artists at the Maharatta court in Tanjore, from about the 16th to the 18th centuries, turned out a great deal of manuscript illustrations, and some of these miniatures are superb. But they also painted on temple walls Their work can be admired on the walls around the Ramaswami temple at Kumbakonam, depicting scenes from the "Ramayana".



1. The temple of Naṭarāja (Dancing Śiva), Chidambaram, District South Arcot



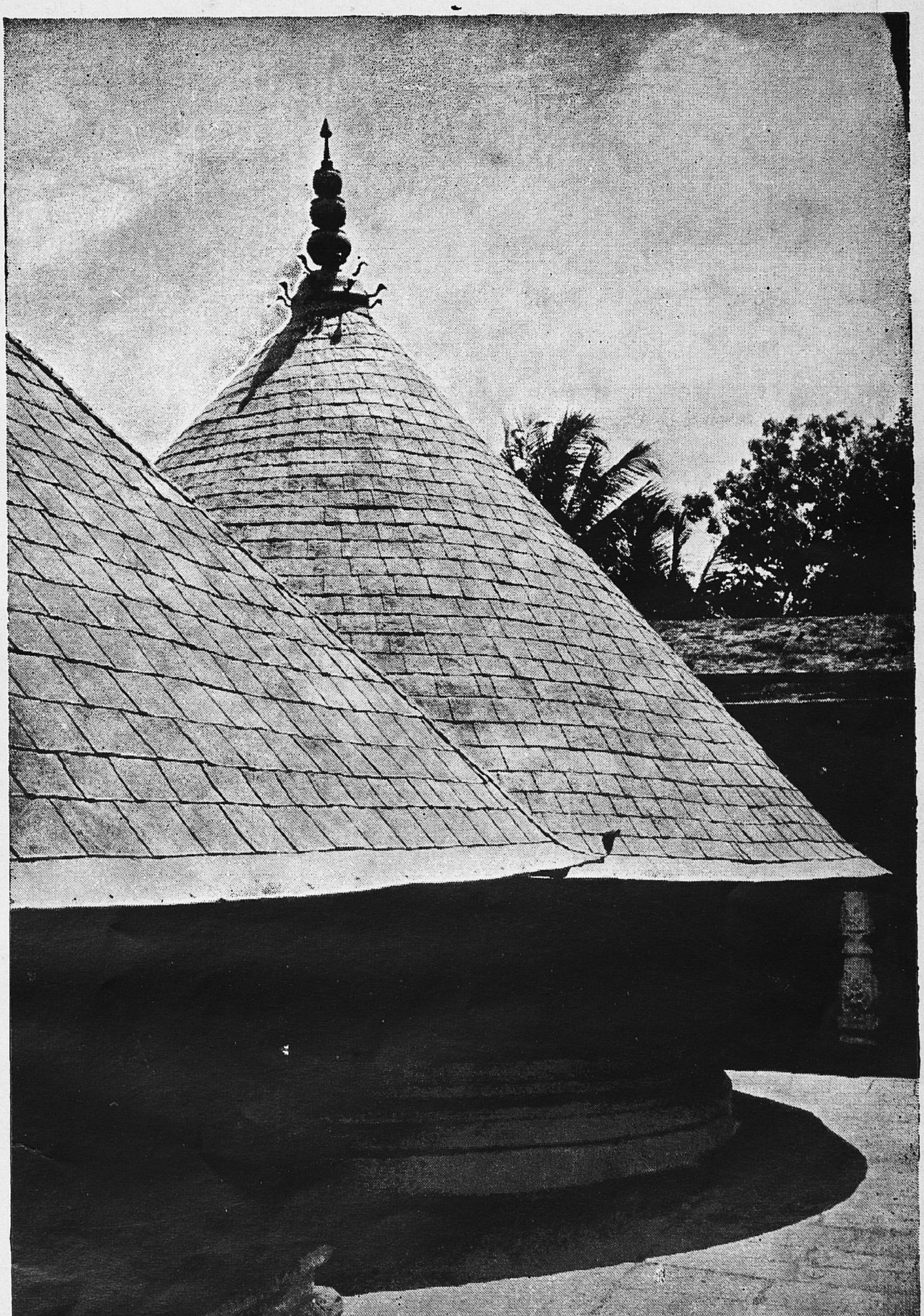
2. The Vimāna of Alagarkoil. Alagarkoil, District Madurai.



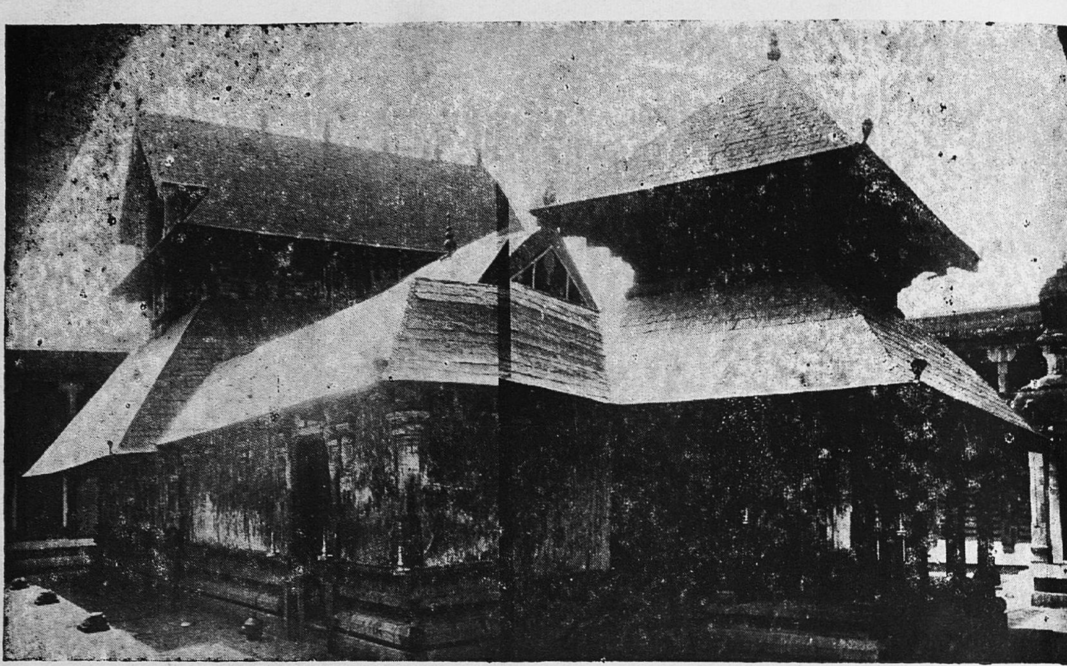
3. The vimāna of Srī Ranganātha temple, Srirangam, District Thiruchi



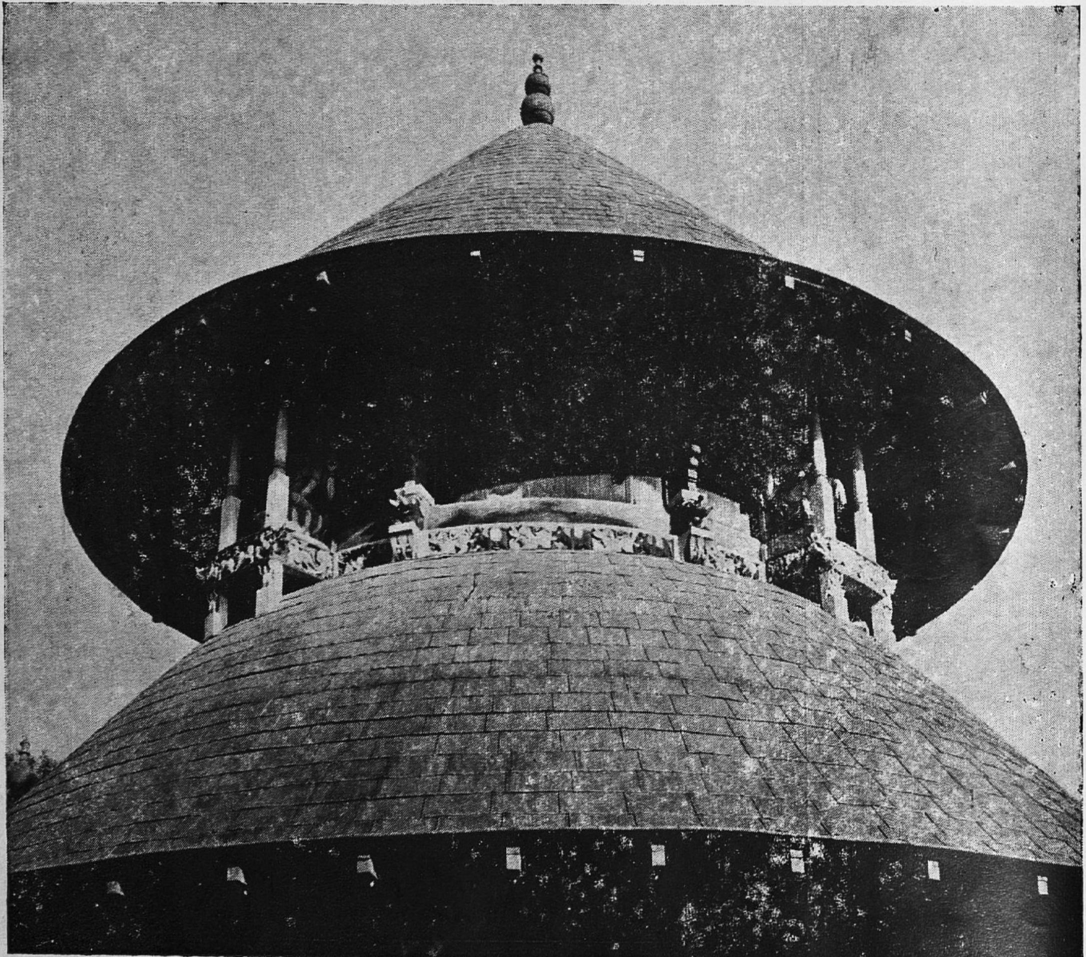
4. The Srīkoil of Thembaladhipa, Ponmana Aruvikkara, District Kanyakumari



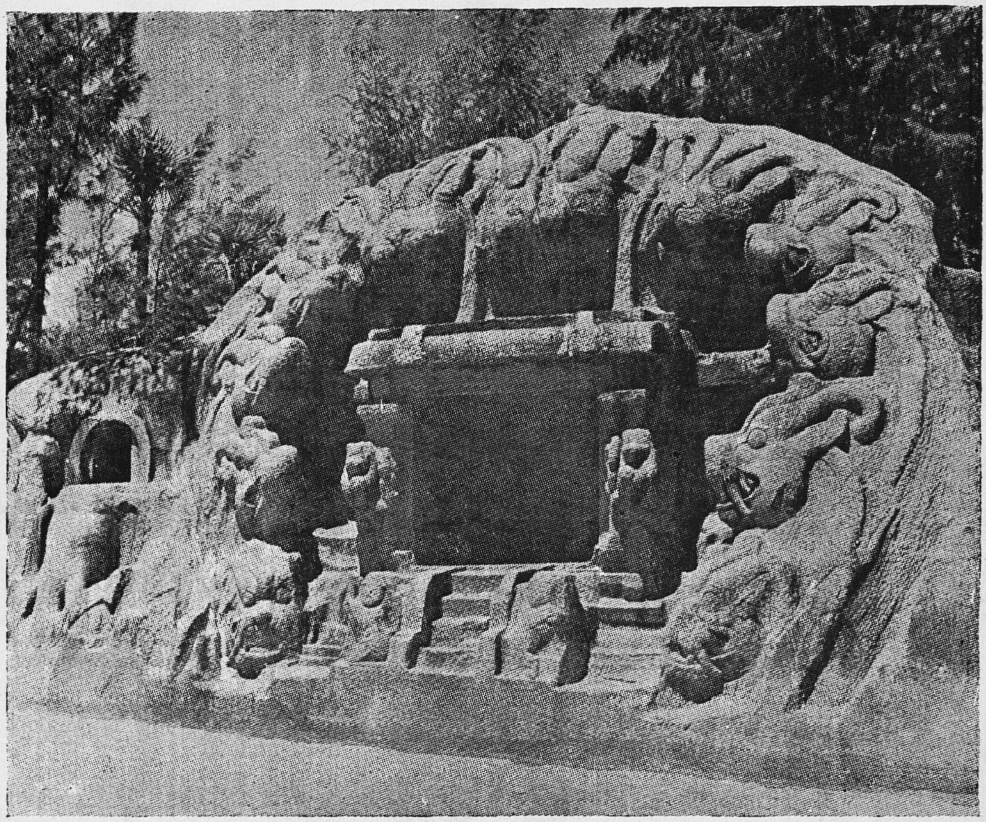
5. The Mahādeva Srīkoil, Thirupparappu, District Kanyakumari



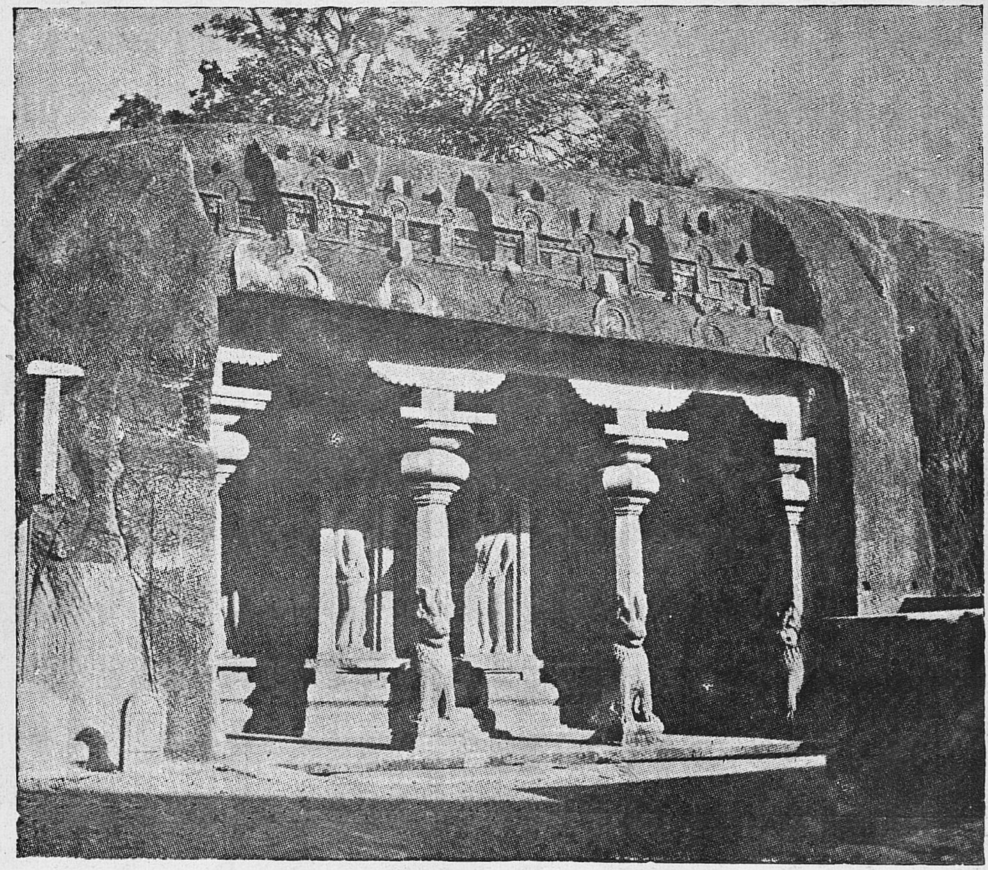
6 a. The temple of Ādikesava Perumāl, Thiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari



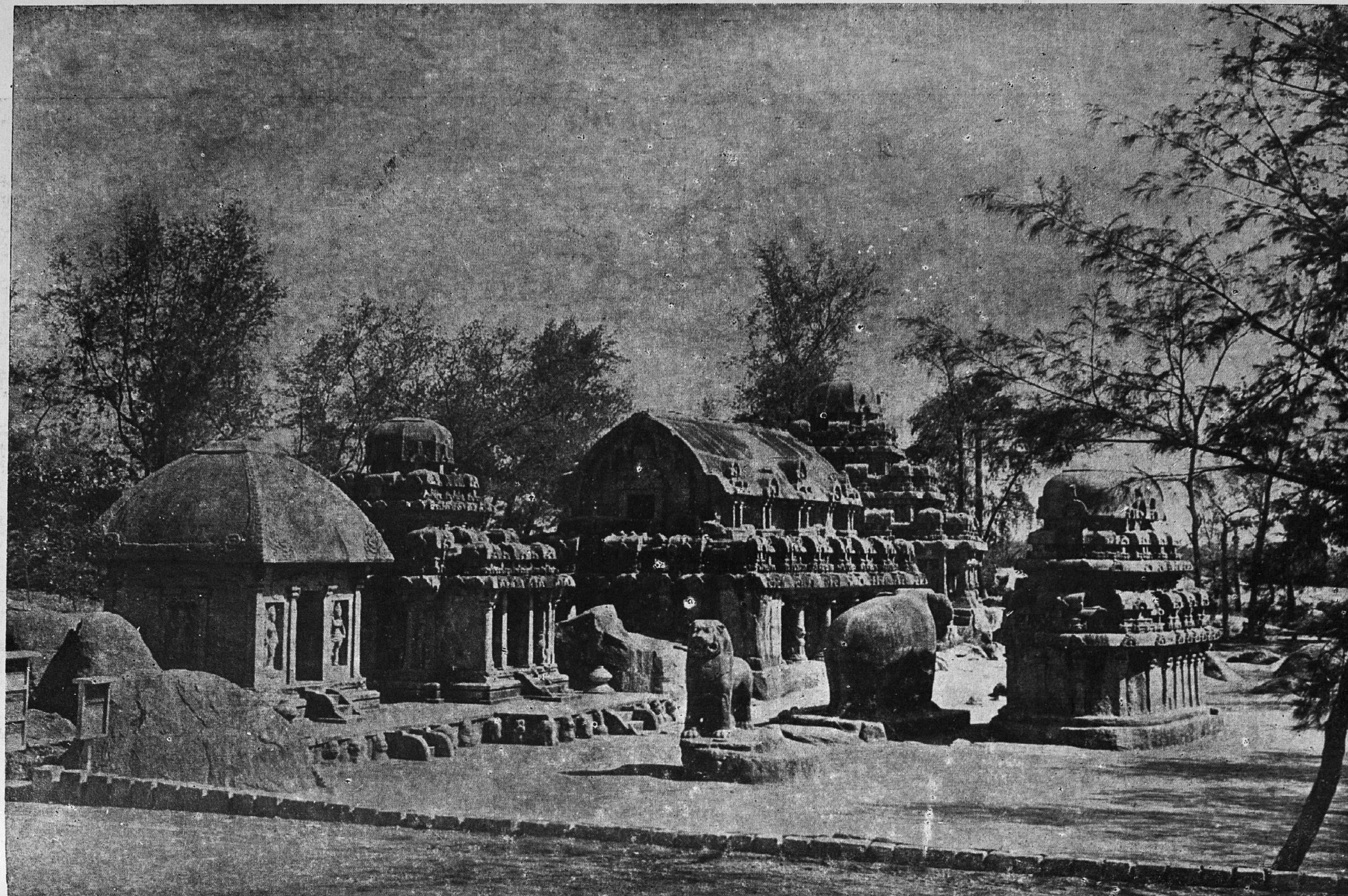
6 b. The Thrippaniyode Mahādevar temple, Valvechagoshtam, District Kanyakumari



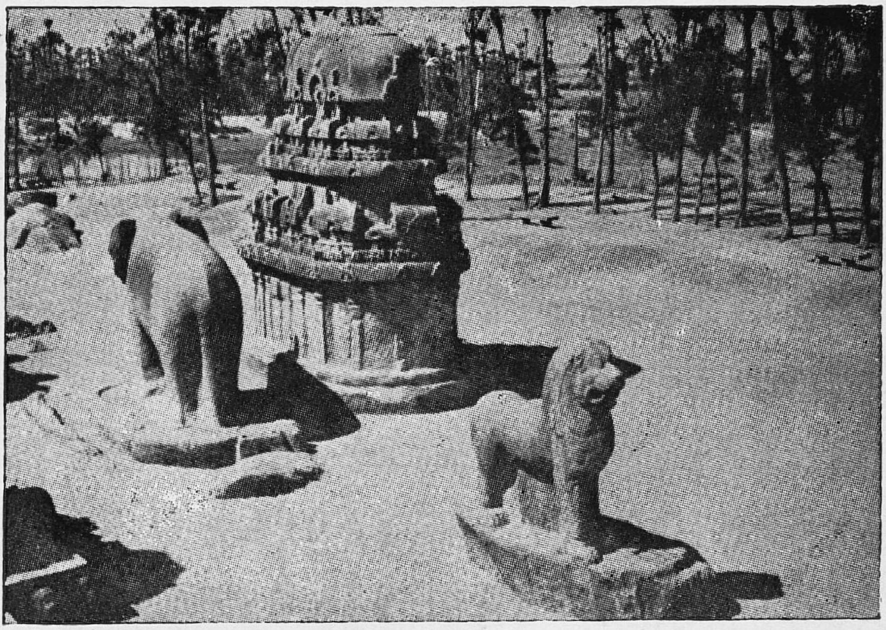
7 a. The Tiger Cave, Saluvankuppam (Mamallapuram), 8th century A. D.



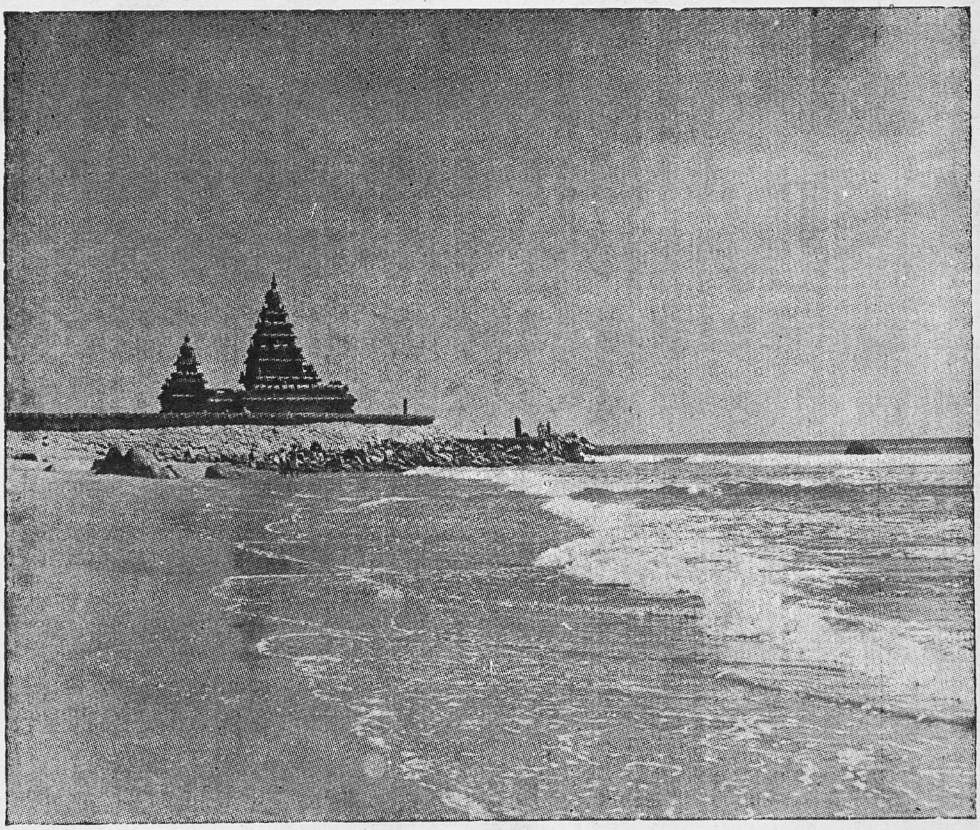
7 b. The Varāha cave temple, Mamallapuram, 8th century A. D.



8. The monolithic temples (five rathas), Mamallapuram, 8th century



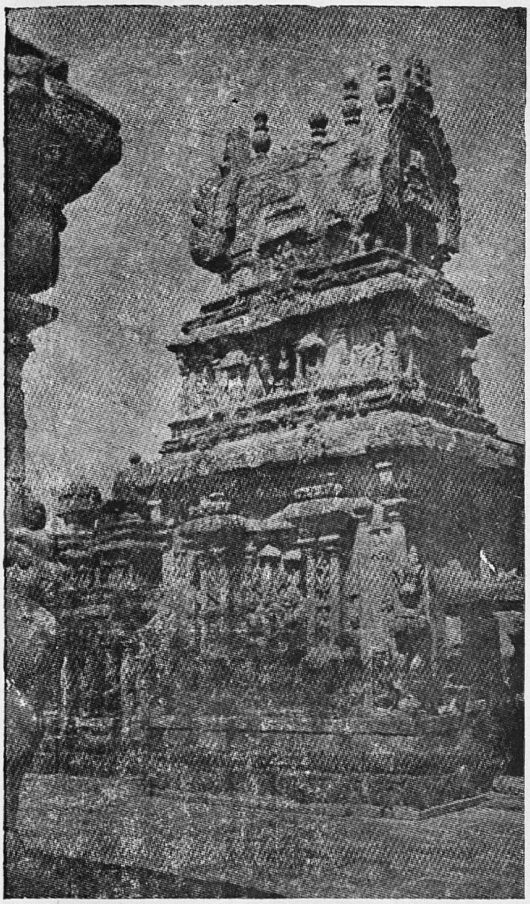
9 a. The monolith Sahadeva ratha, Mamallapuram
8th century A. D.



9 b. The seashore temple, Mamallapuram, built by Rajasimha,
8th century A. D.



10. The Rājasimheśvara temple (Kailāsanātha), Kanchipuram, built by Pallava Rajasimha, 8th century A. D.



11a. The Mahendravarmeśvara temple, Kanchipuram, built by Mahendra, son of Rajasimha, 8th century A. D.



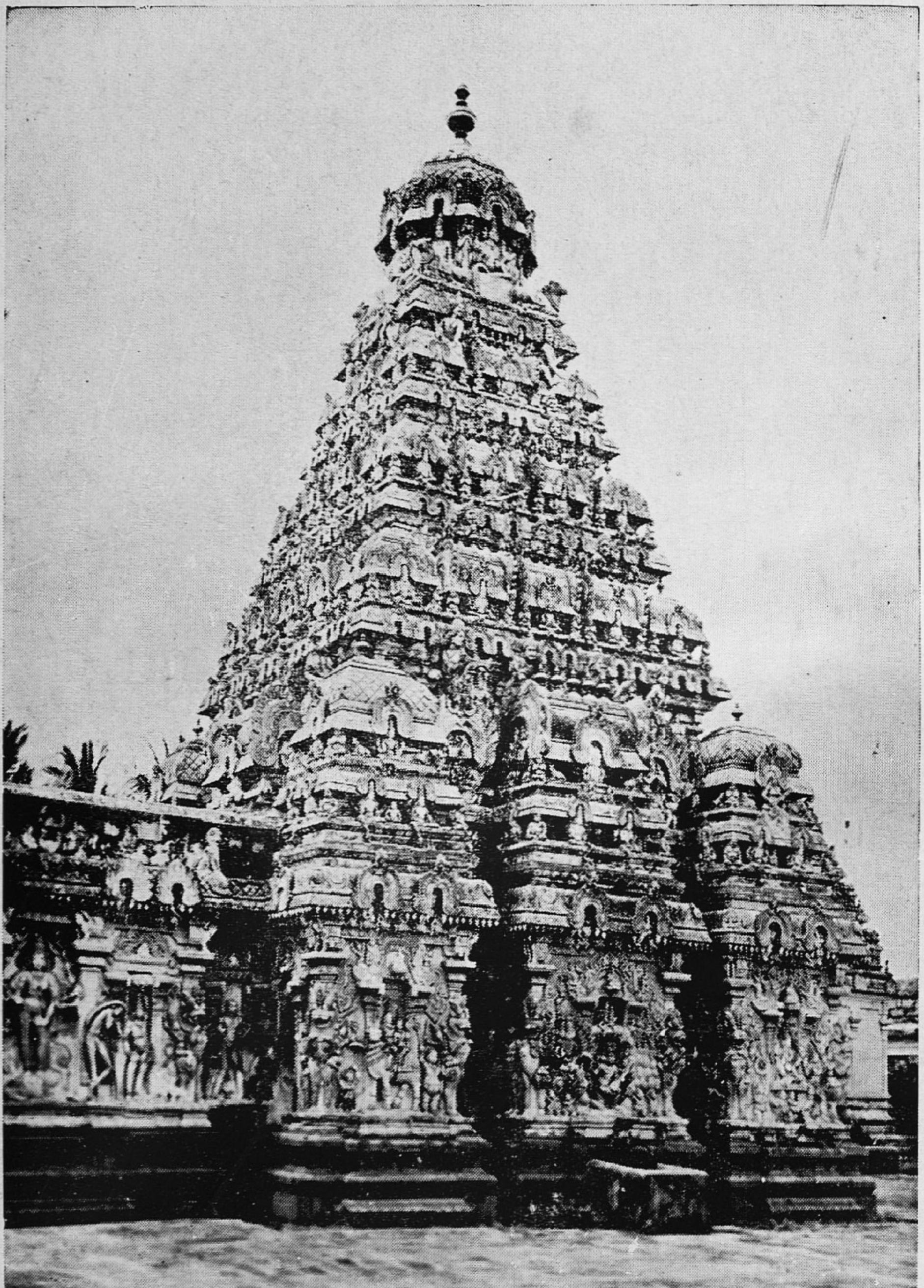
11b. A row of small shrines, Kanchipuram, built by the Queens of Rajasimha, 8th century A. D.



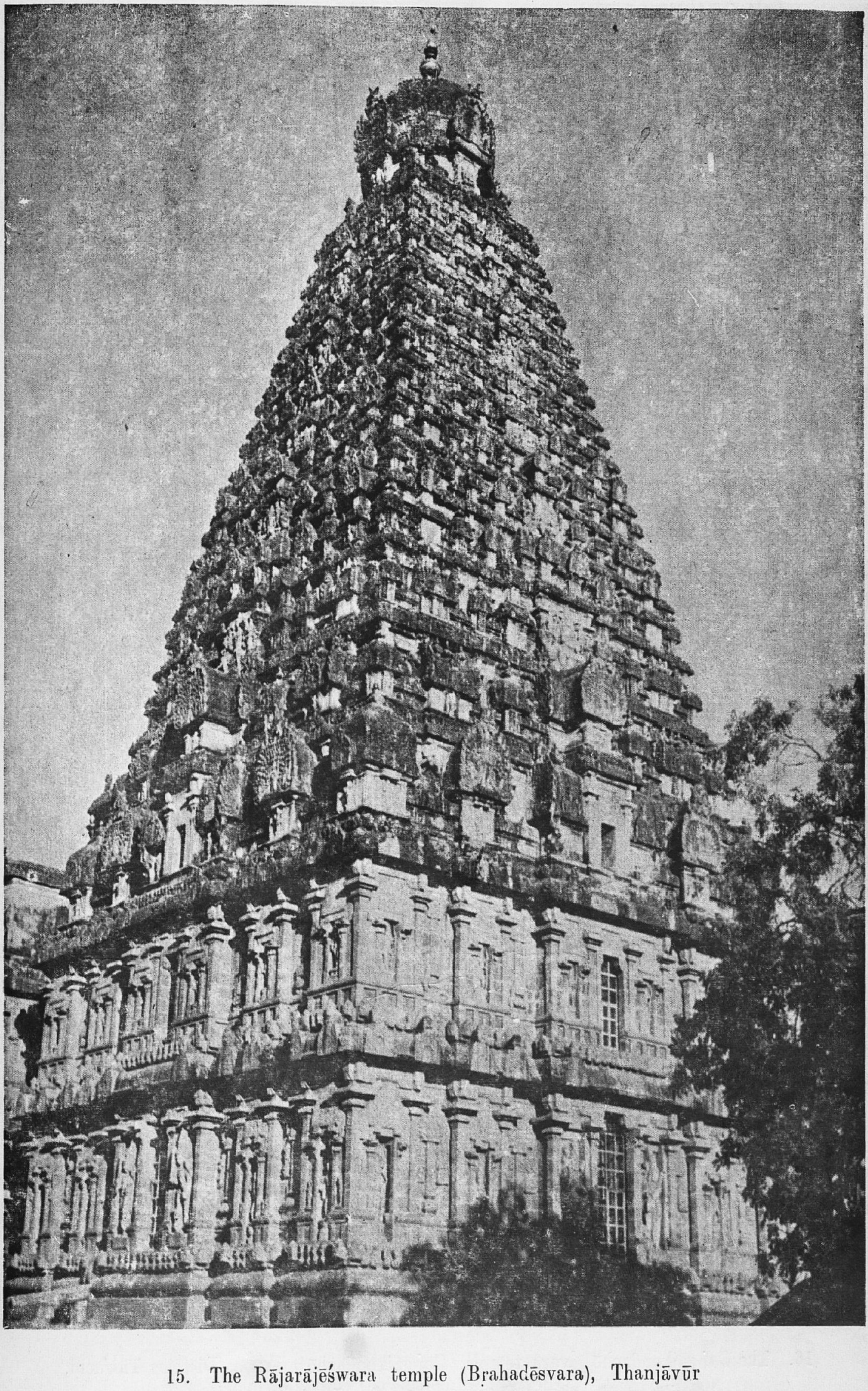
12. The Avanikandarpa Īśvaragṛham (Twin temples), Perumpaḷuvūr, District Thiruchi, 9th century A. D.



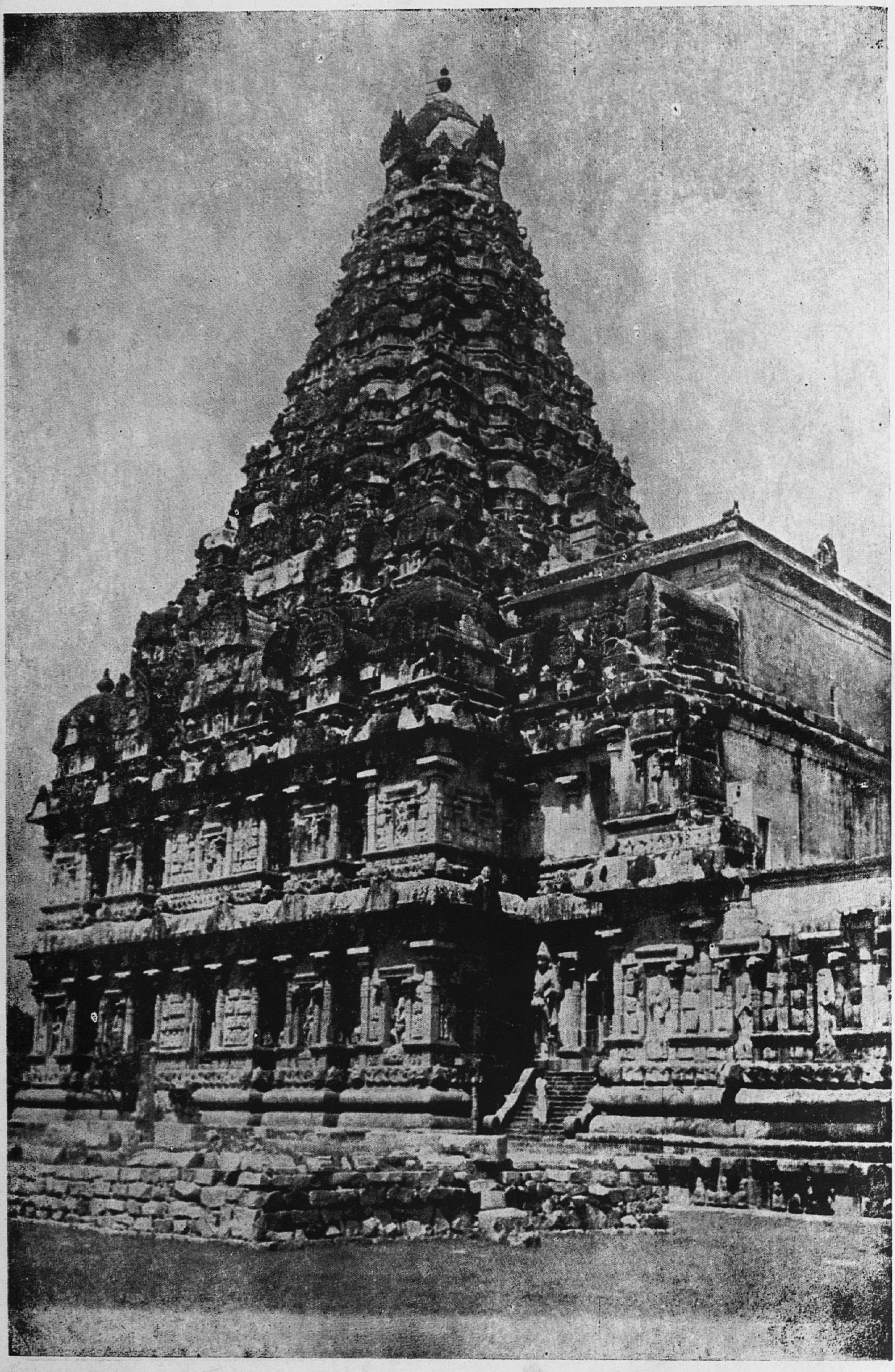
13. The Mūvarkoil, Kodumbalur, District Thiruchi, built by Bhūti Vikramakesari, 10th century A. D.



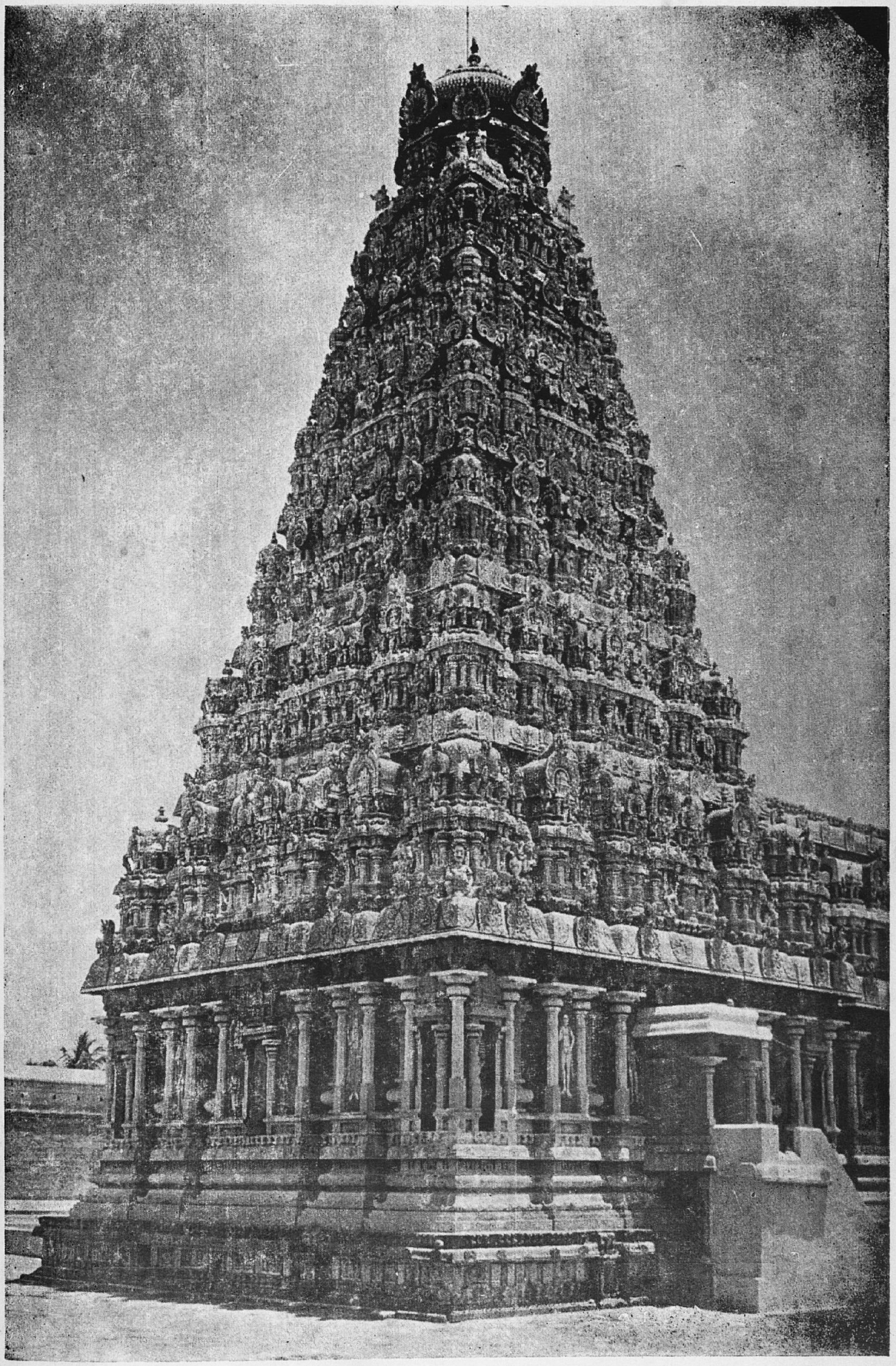
14. The Vīraṭṭānēśvara temple, Tiruvatigai, District South Arcot, Pallava period, built in 7th century A.D. and renovated in 9th century A.D.



15. The Rājarājēśwara temple (Bṛahadēsvara), Thanjāvūr built by the Chōḻa Emperor Rājarāja I, circa 1000 A.D.



16. The Gaṅgaikoṇḍachōḻīśvara temple, Gaṅgaikoṇḍachōḻapuram, District Thiruchi, built by the Chōḻa Emperor Rājēndra I, circa 1030 A.D.



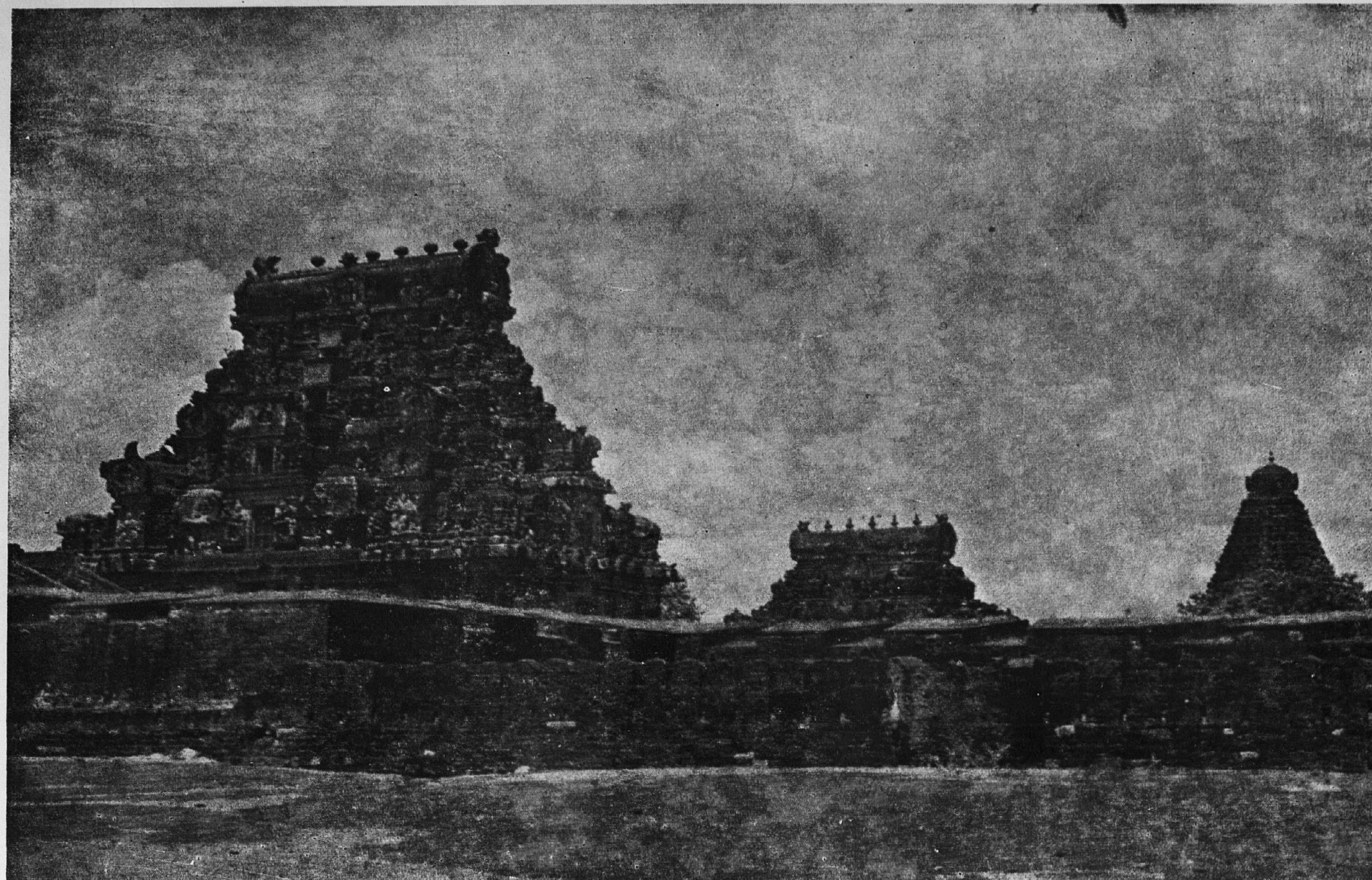
17. The Tribhuvanavīreśvara temple, Tribhuvanam, District Thanjavur, built by the Chōḻa King Kulottunga III, circa 1200 A.D.



18. The Gopura of Sri Mahādēvar temple, Keralapuram, District Kanyakumari



19. The Gopura of Ādikēśavap perumāḷ temple, Thiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari



20. Two gopuras in front of the great temple, Thanjāvūr, District Thanjavur, built by Rājarāja and his general Krishnan Raman



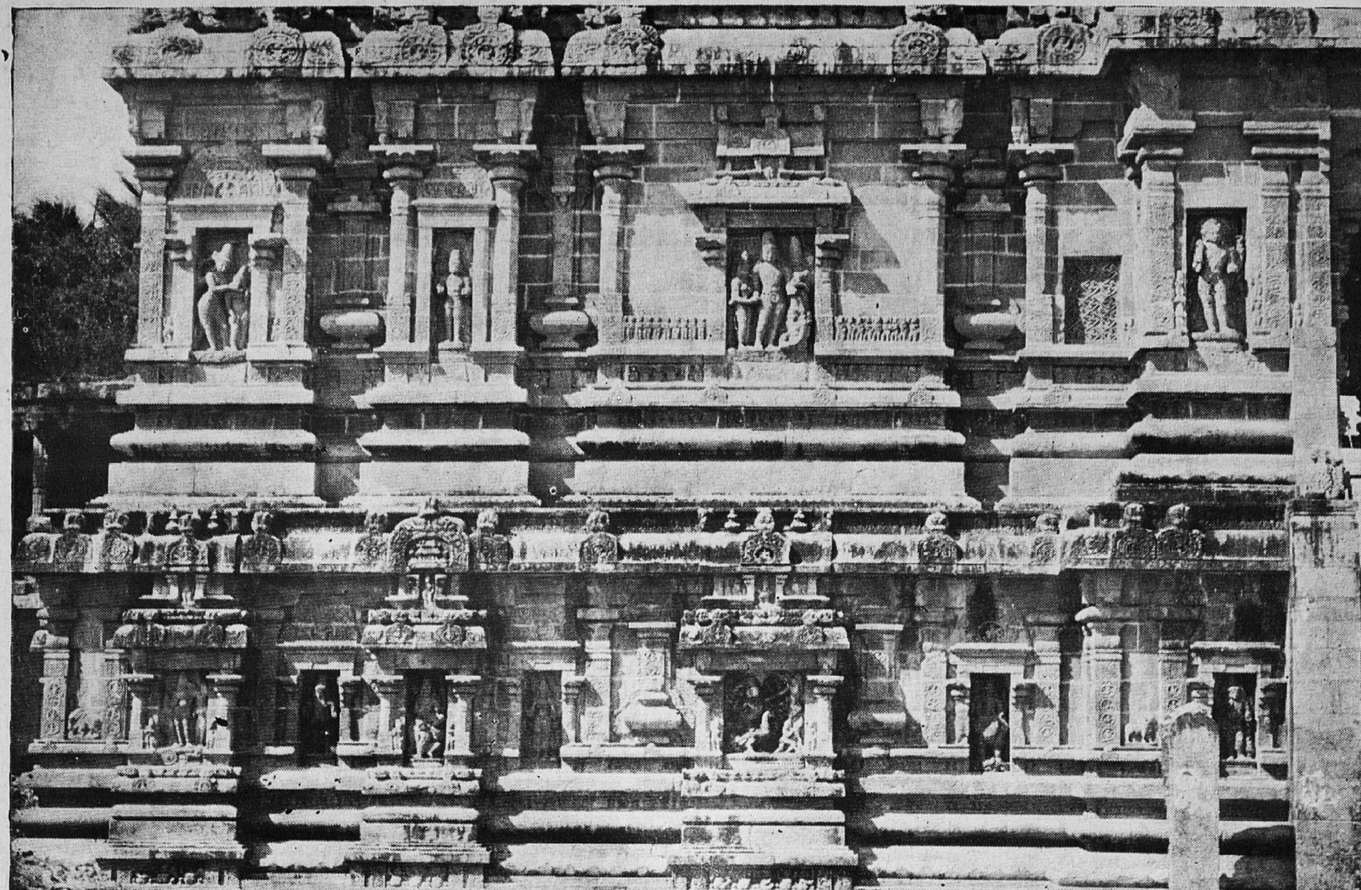
21. The Gopura (*dvāra śālā*) of the Kailāśanātha temple of Kanchi, Pallava period, 8th century A.D., built by Rajasimha



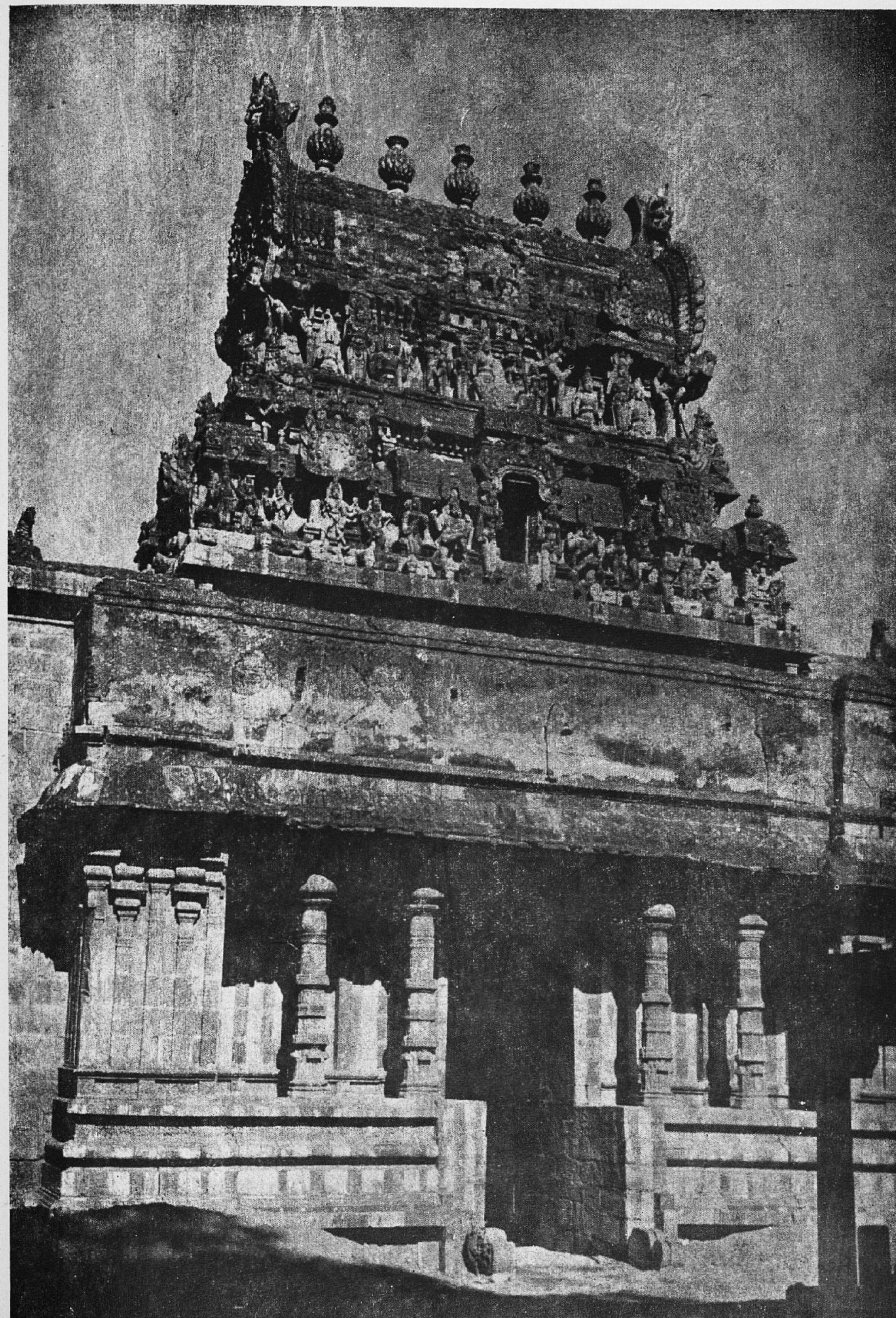
22. Rājarājan Thiruvāsal (the inner gopura) of the great temple, Thanjavūr, Chola period, 1000 A.D.



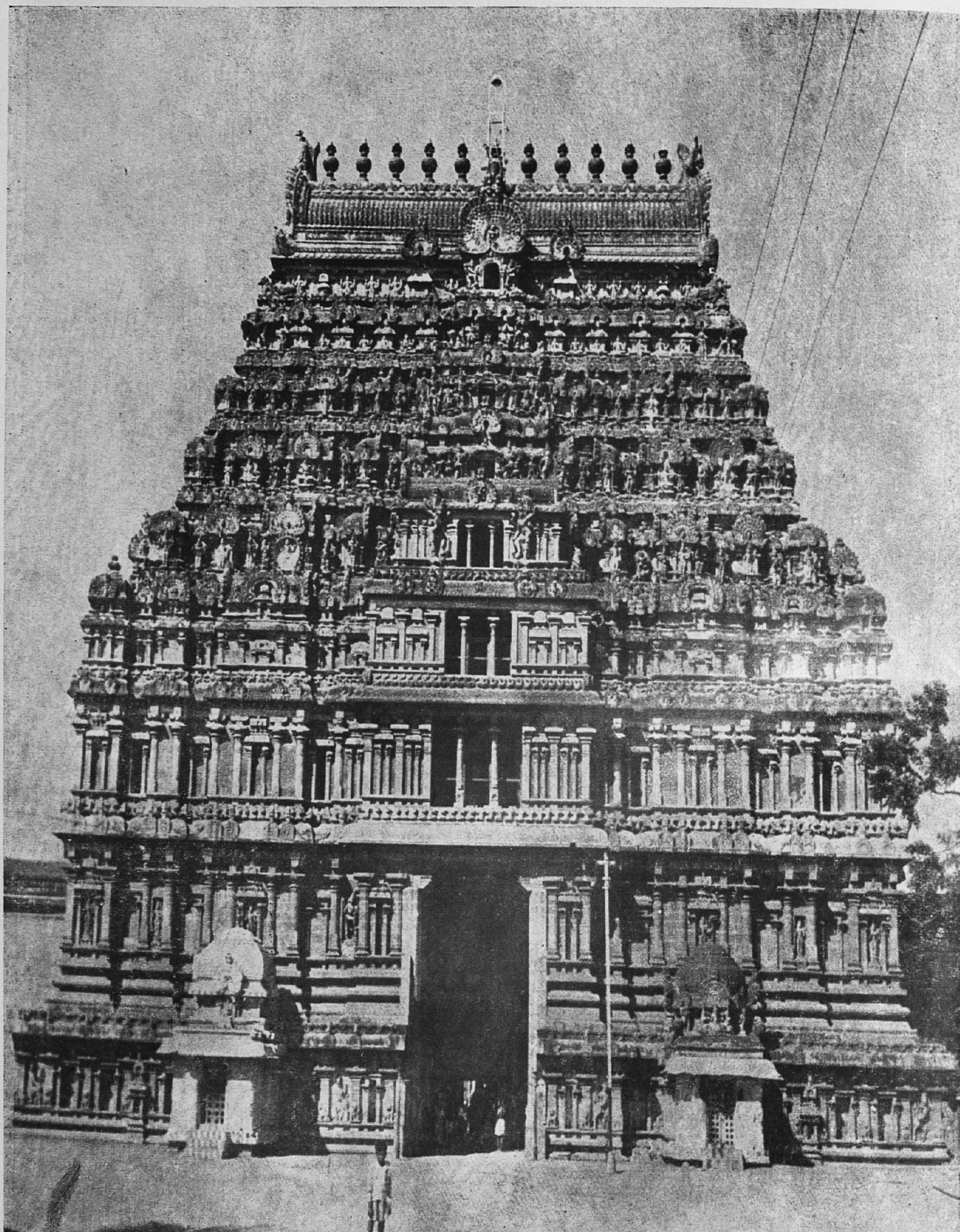
23. Western Gopura, Chidambaram, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



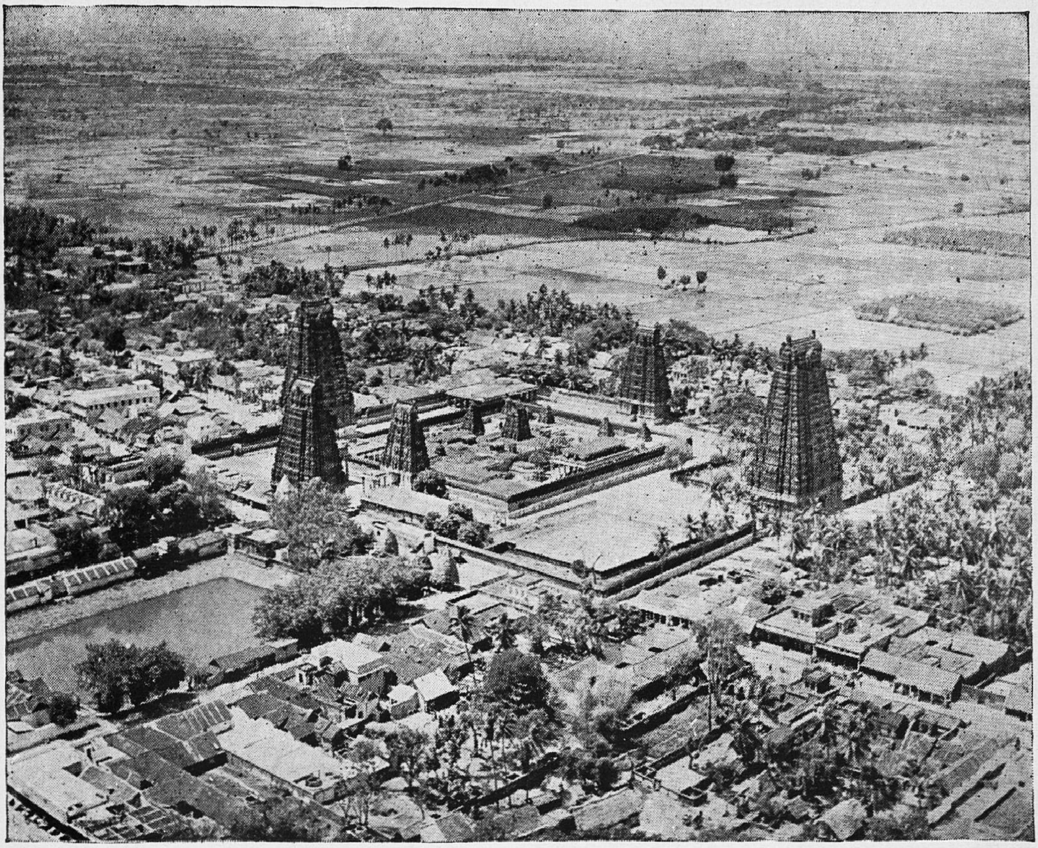
24. Base of the western Gopura, Chidambaram, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



25. The inner Gopura of the Śiva temple, Darasuram, Chola period, 12th century A.D., built by Rājarāja II.



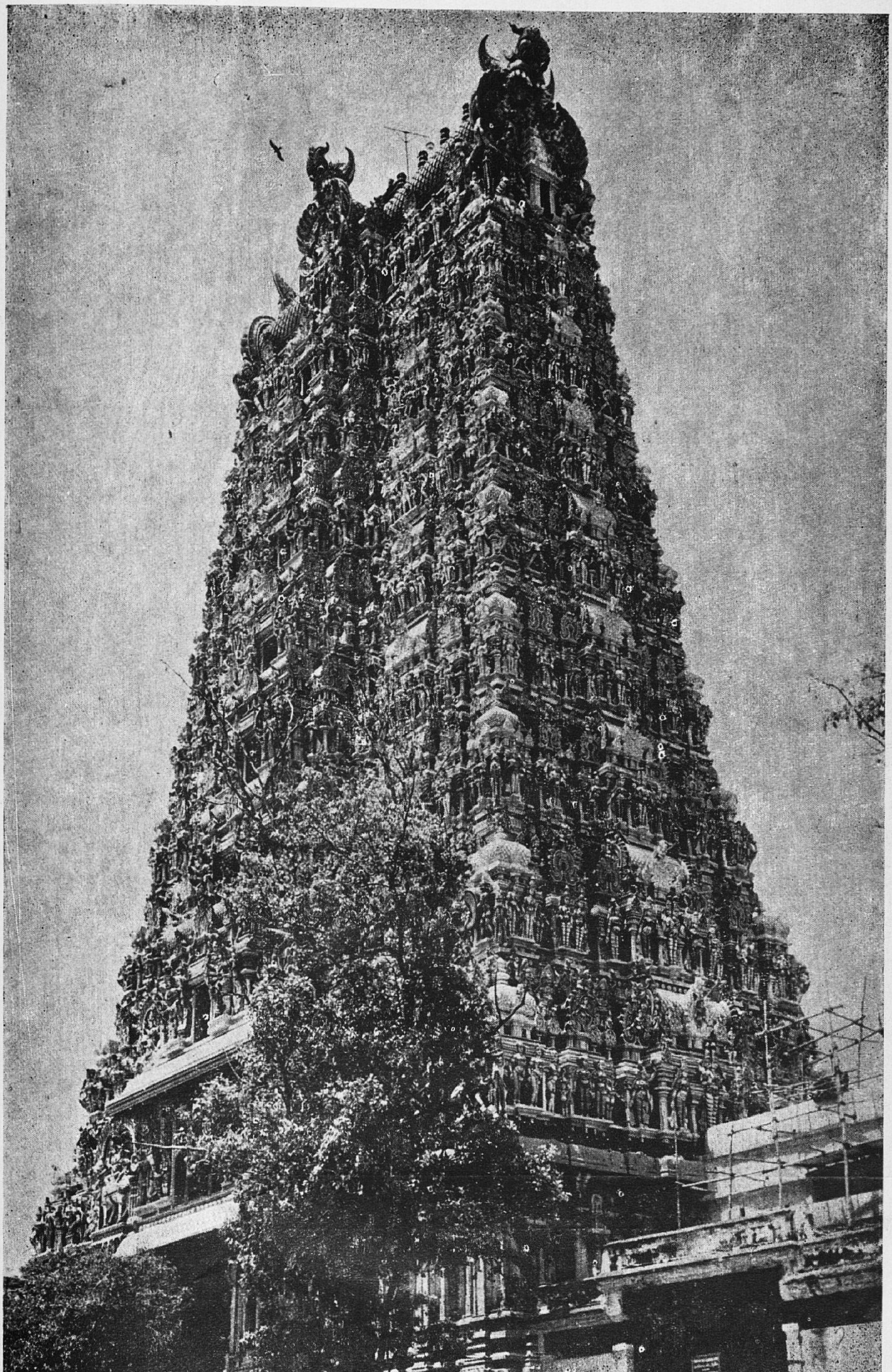
26. The western Gopura of the Tyagarāja temple, Thiruvarūr, Chola period, 12th century A.D., built by Kulottunga III.



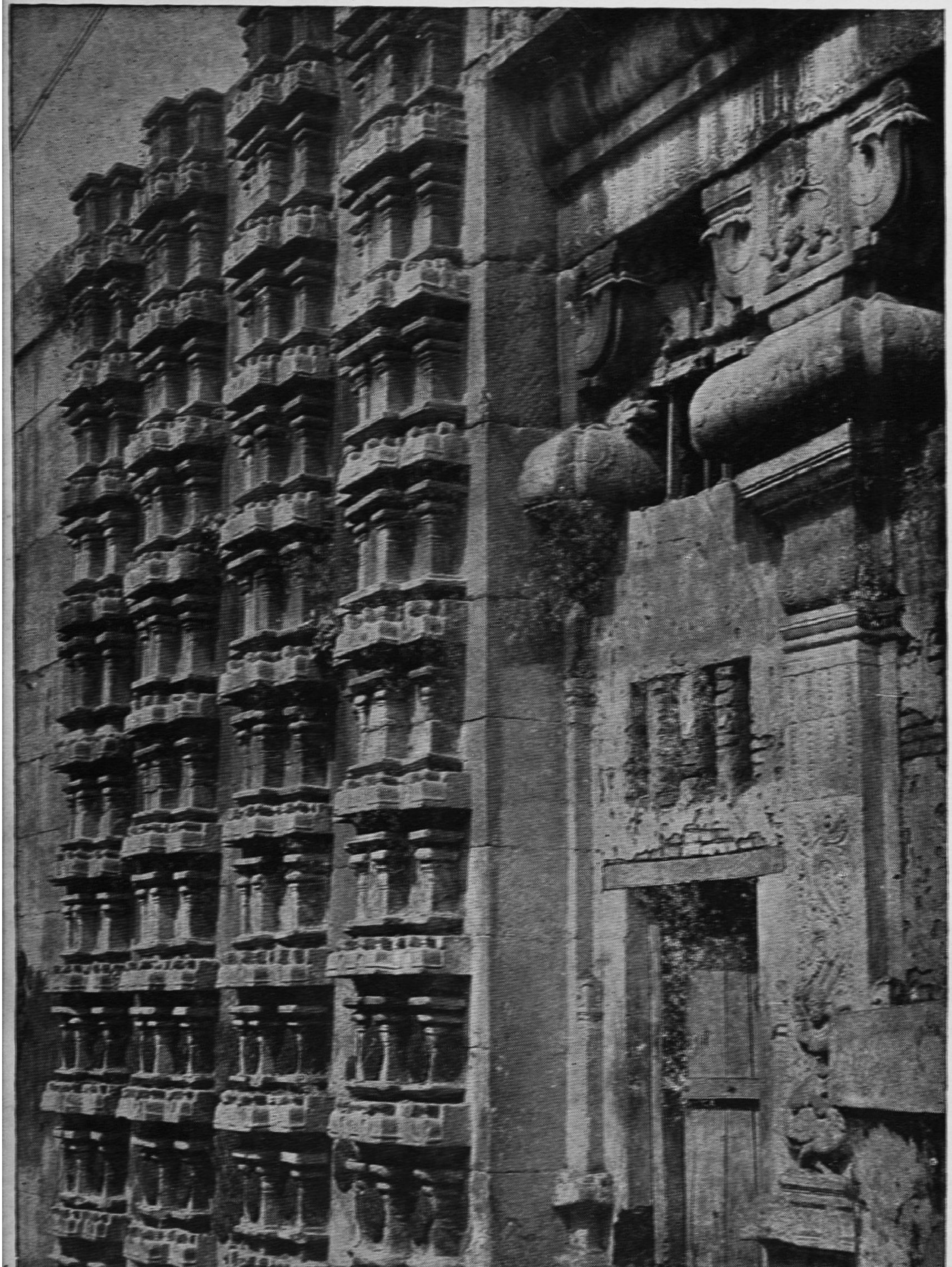
27. A view of the Gopuras of Thiruvannamalai



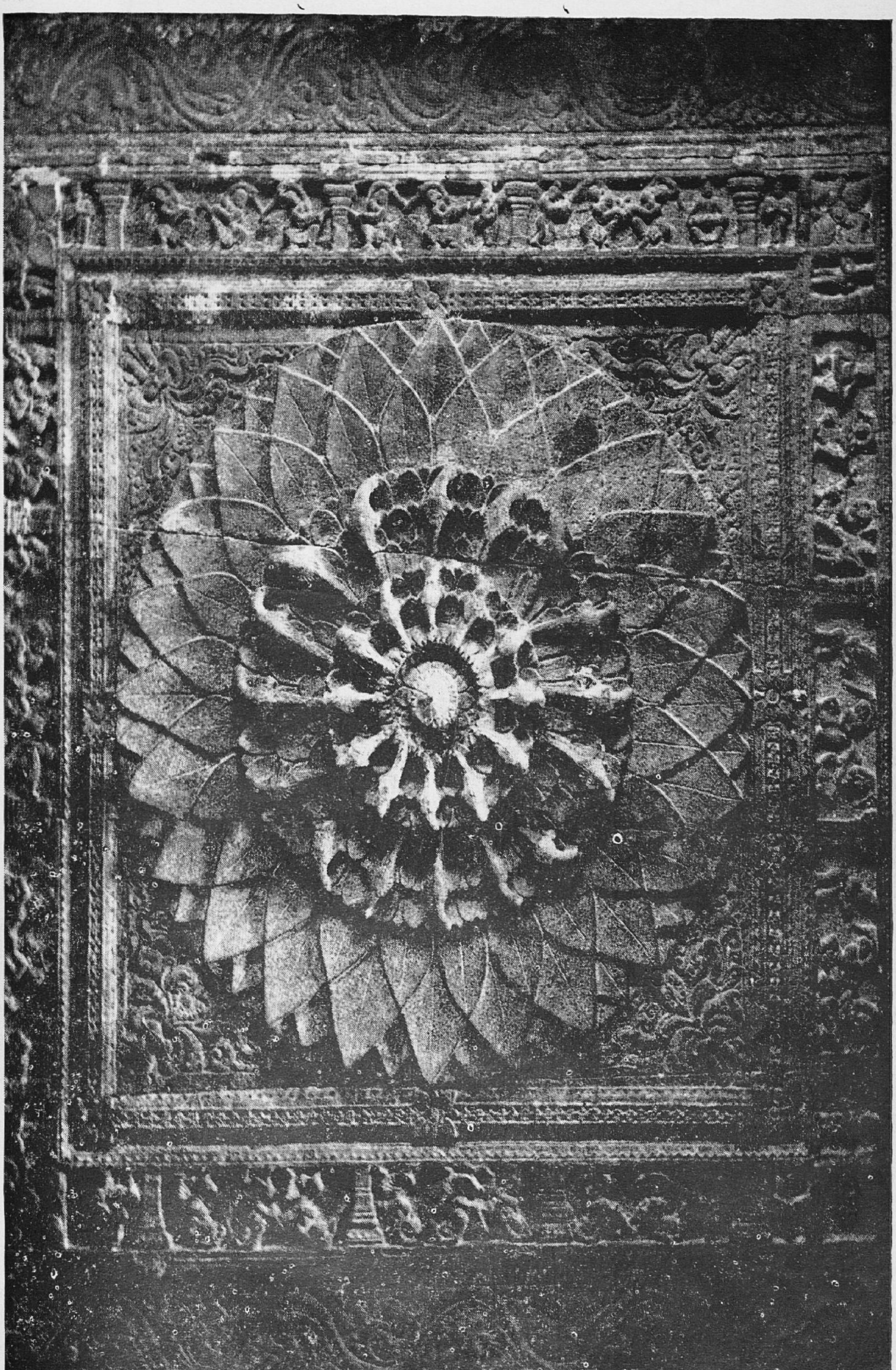
28. The outer Gopura of the Vishṇu temple, Srivilliputhur, later Pandya period, 15th century A.D.



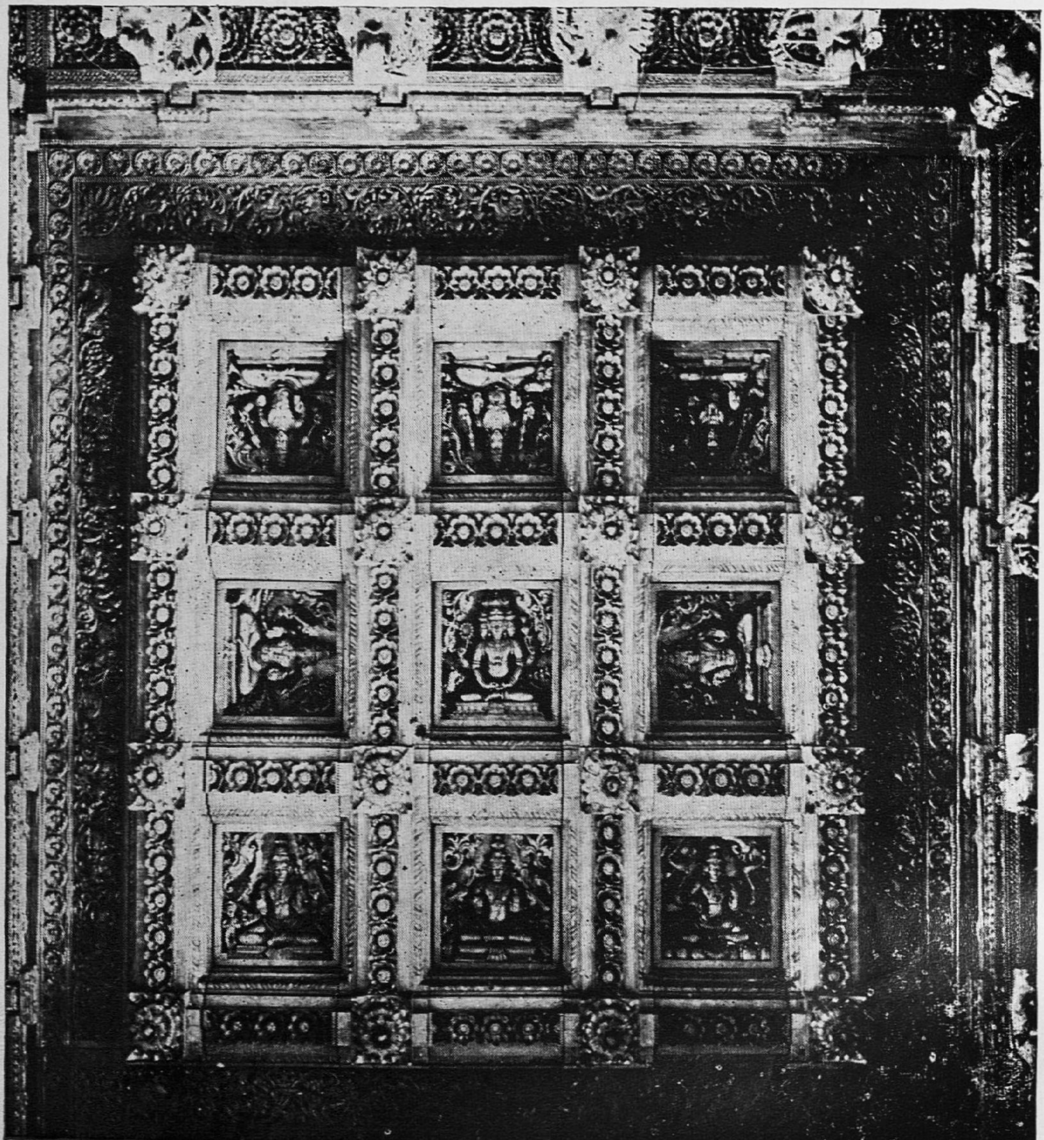
29. A Gopura of the Mīnākshi temple, Madurai, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



30. A view of an entrance to the Sri Ranganātha temple, Srirangam.

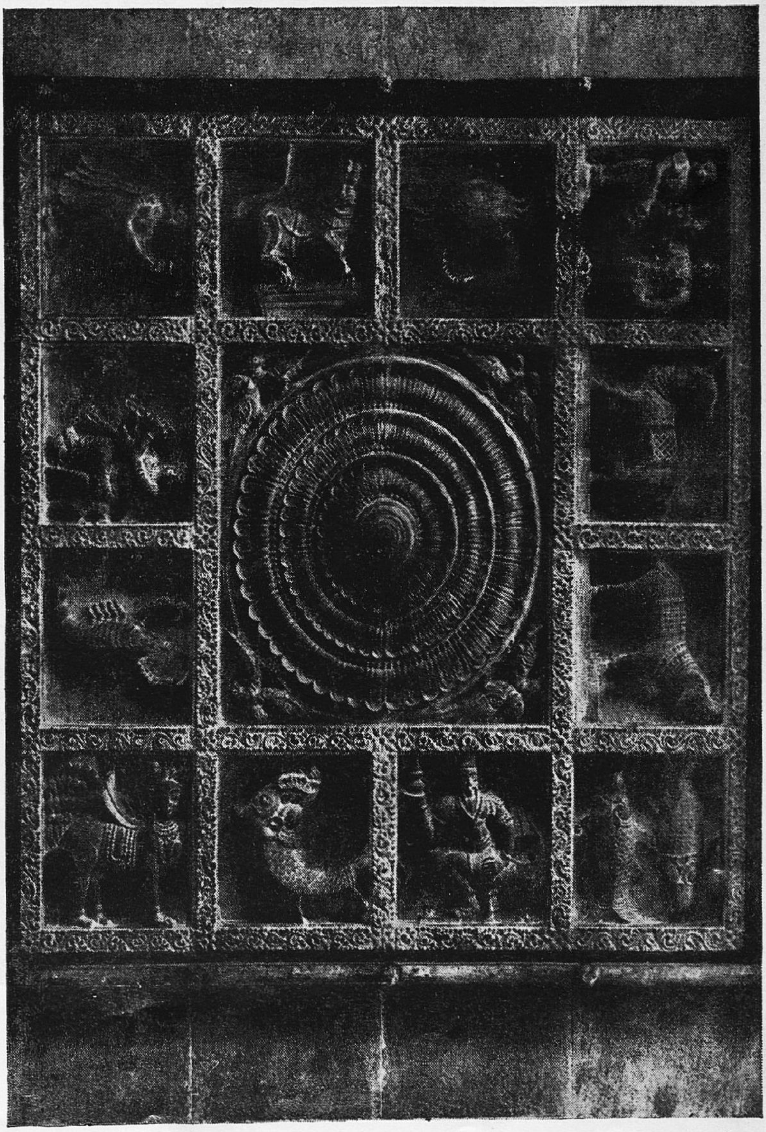


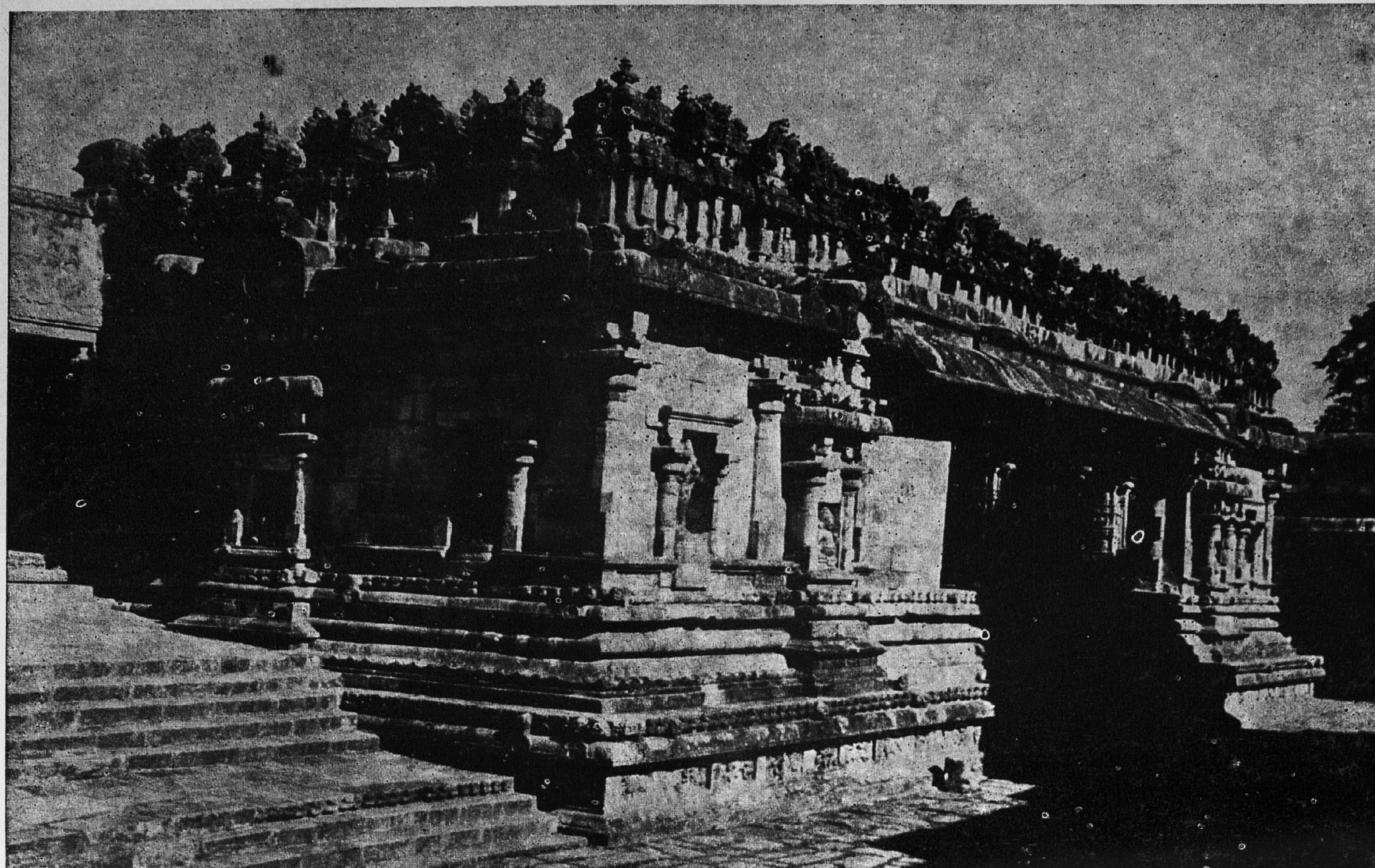
31. An ornate ceiling (Parrots pecking lotus petals), stone, Bhūvarāha temple Srimushnam, Nayak period, 16th century A. D.



32. Navagrahas (nine planets) in the ceiling, Ādikesava temple, Thiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari, 17th century A. D.

. Rāsi maṇḍala (the Zodiac) in the ceiling, stone, Subrahmanya temple, Pollachi, District Coimbatore, 12th century A.D.





34. Rājagambhīran maṇḍapa, Śiva temple, Darasuram, Chōḷa period, 12th century A.D.



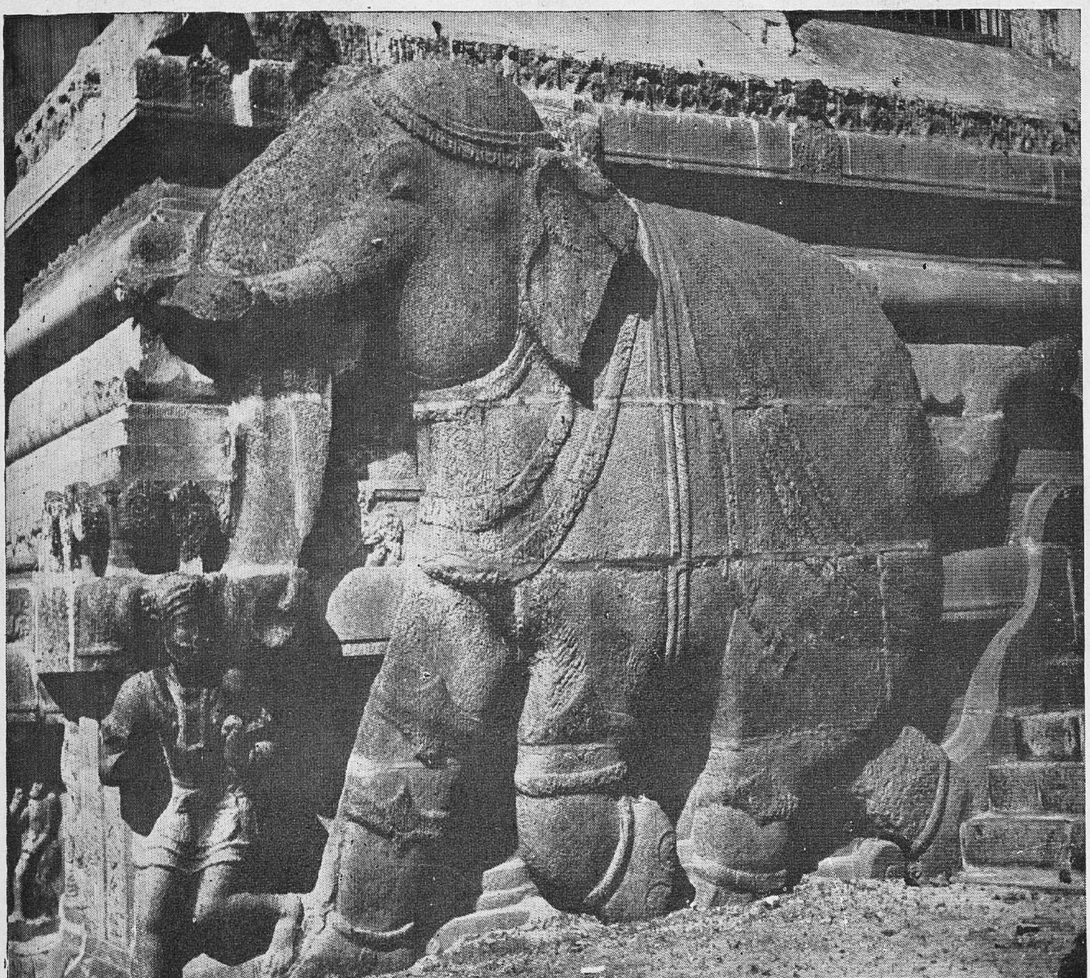
35. (a) Makaratōraṇa, Koraṅganātha temple, Srinivasanallur, early Chōḷa period, 9th century A.D.

35 (b) Base of the Kailāśanātha temple, Kanchipuram, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.





36. Base of the prākāra in the Amman shrine, showing dancers and musicians, Nataraja temple, Chidambaram, District South Arcot, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



37. The base of Thousand pillared hall showing a tusker, in the Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram, District South Arcot, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



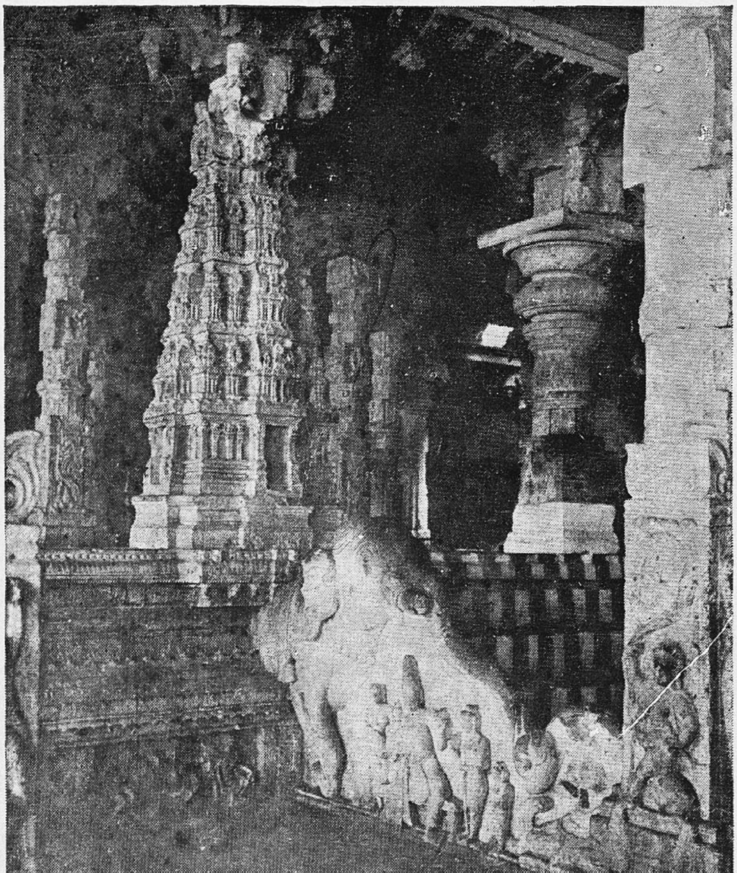
38. A pillar in the Kalyāṇamaṇḍapa, Varadarāja temple – Kanchipuram District Chingleput, Vijayanagar period, 16th century A. D.



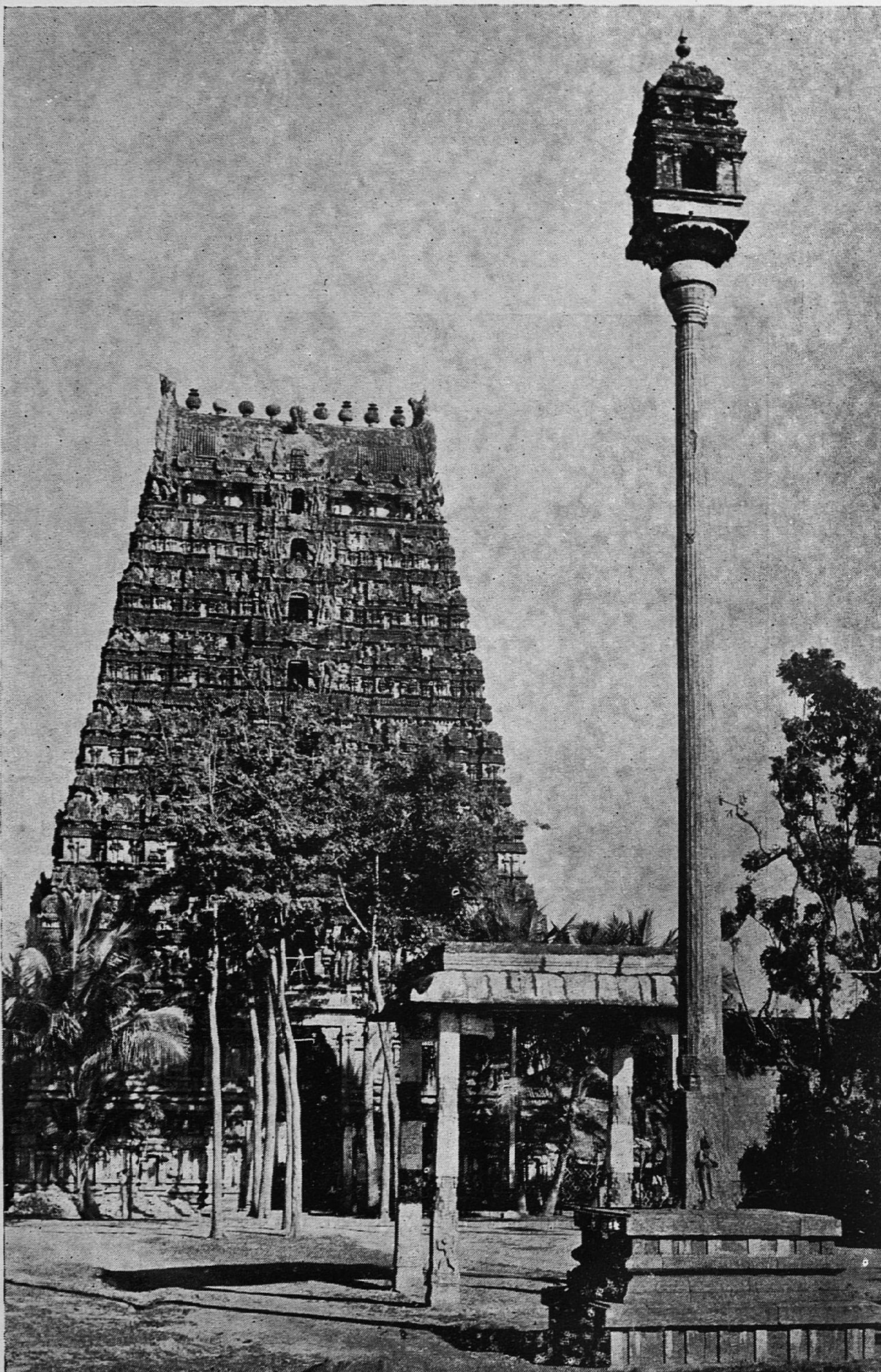
39. Pillars in the Bhūvarāha temple, Srimushnam, District South Arcot, Nayak period, 16th century A. D.



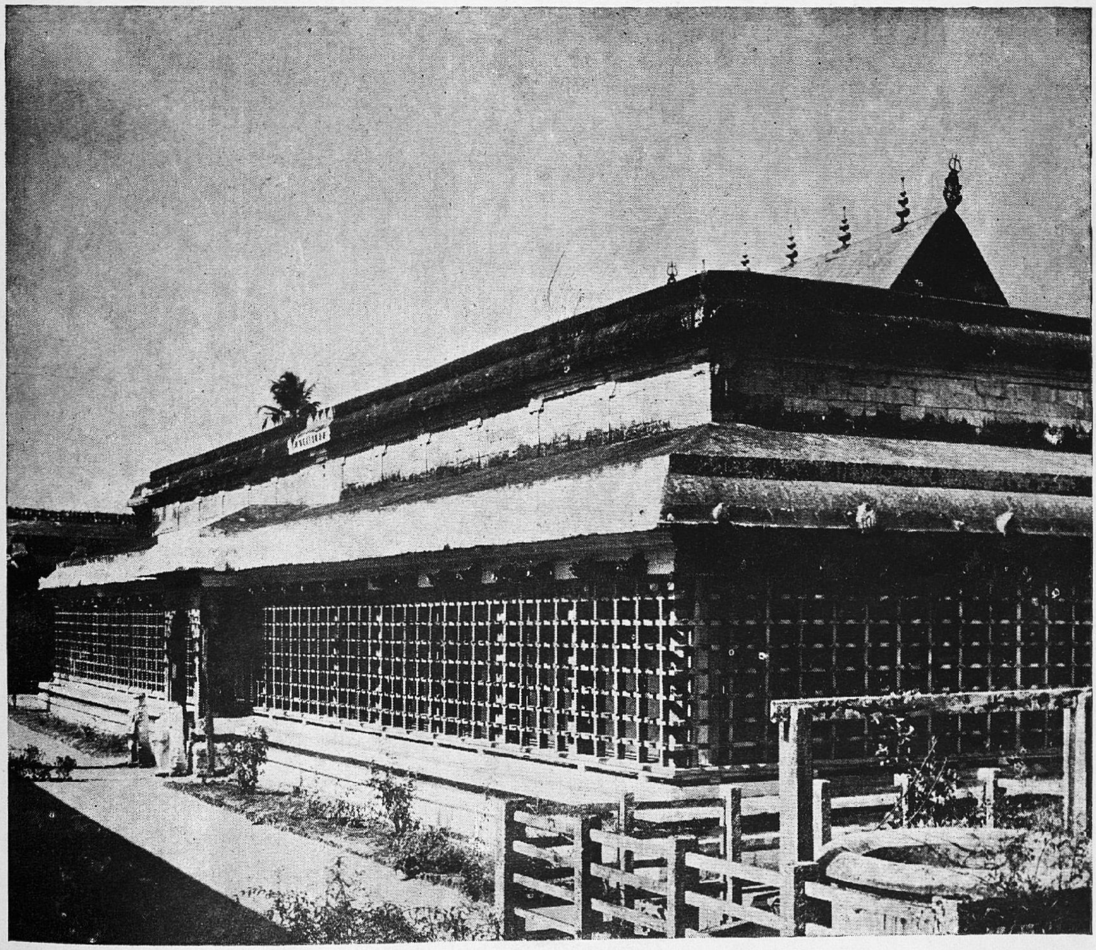
40. Pillars in the Horse court, Srī Ranganātha temple, Srirangam, District Thiruchi, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



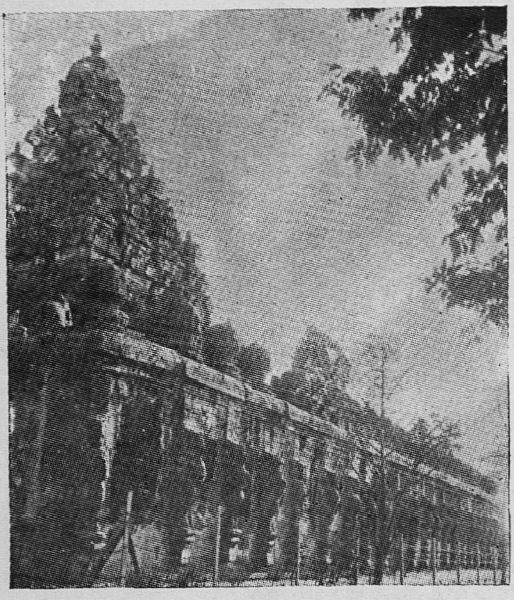
41. A Pillar in the form of a gopura, Nellaiappar temple, Thirunelveli, District Thirunelveli, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



42. The garuda sthambam in front of the gopura, Srī Bhūvarāha temple, Srimushnam, District South Arcot, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



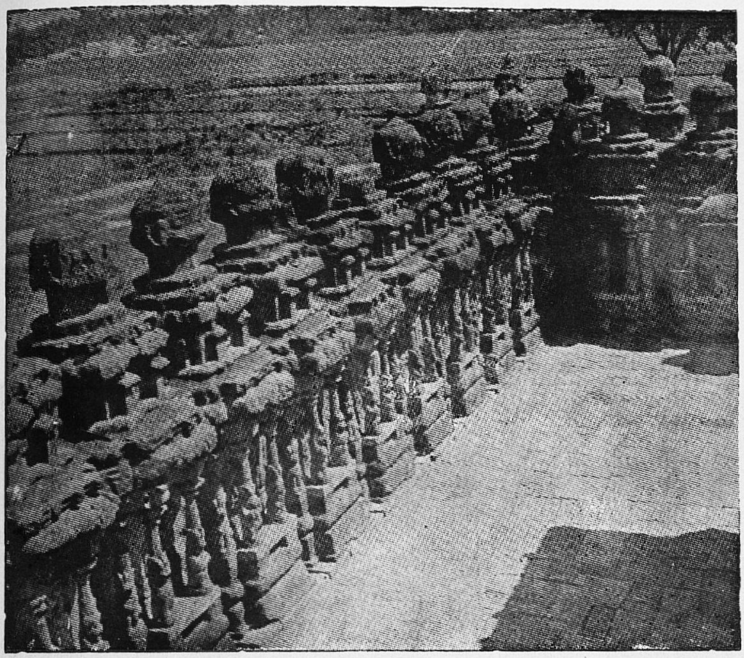
43. Nālambalam with Viḷakkumādam, Ādikēsava temple, Thiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari, 16th century A. D.



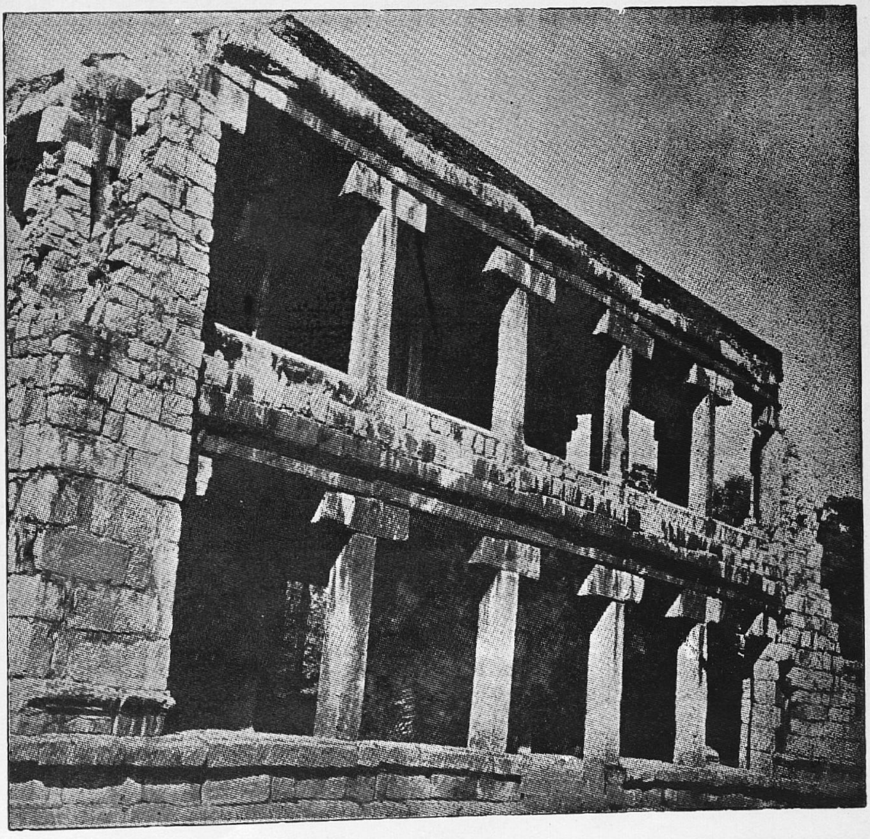
44 a. A view of the prākāra wall of Kailāśanātha Temple, Kanchi, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



44 b. A view of the prākāra wall of Śrī Raṅganātha Temple, Srirangam, District Trichy, 12th century A.D.



45 a. A view of the enclosure of the Kailāśanātha Temple, Kanchipuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



45 b. A view of the storied enclosure of the Great Temple, Gangaikondacholapuram, District Trichy, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



46. A view of the Śrivalipura, Sri Ādi Kēśavaperumāḷ temple, Tiruvattar Kalkulam Taluk, District Kanyakumari, 16th century A. D.



47. A view of the Kalyāṇamaṇḍapam, Nellaiappar temple, Thirunelveli, District Thirunelveli, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



48. A dancing scene, – Stone, Tāntōnrīśvara temple, Kanchipuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 5th–6th century A. D.



49. A dancing scene, – Stone, Tāntōnriśvara temple, Kanchipuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 5th–6th century A. D.



50. Śiva with Pārvati and Skanda, stone, Seashore temple, Mamallapuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



51a. Śiva as Bhikshāṭana-stone, Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchipuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A. D.



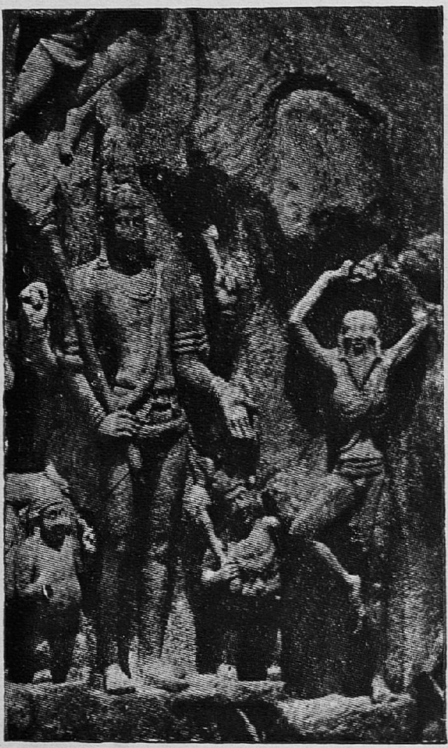
51b. Durgā-stone Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchipuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



52. Vishṇu as Anantasāyi, in the cave temple of Mahishāsuramardini, Mamallapuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



53. Mahishāsuramardini in the Mahishāsuramardini cave temple, Mamallapuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.

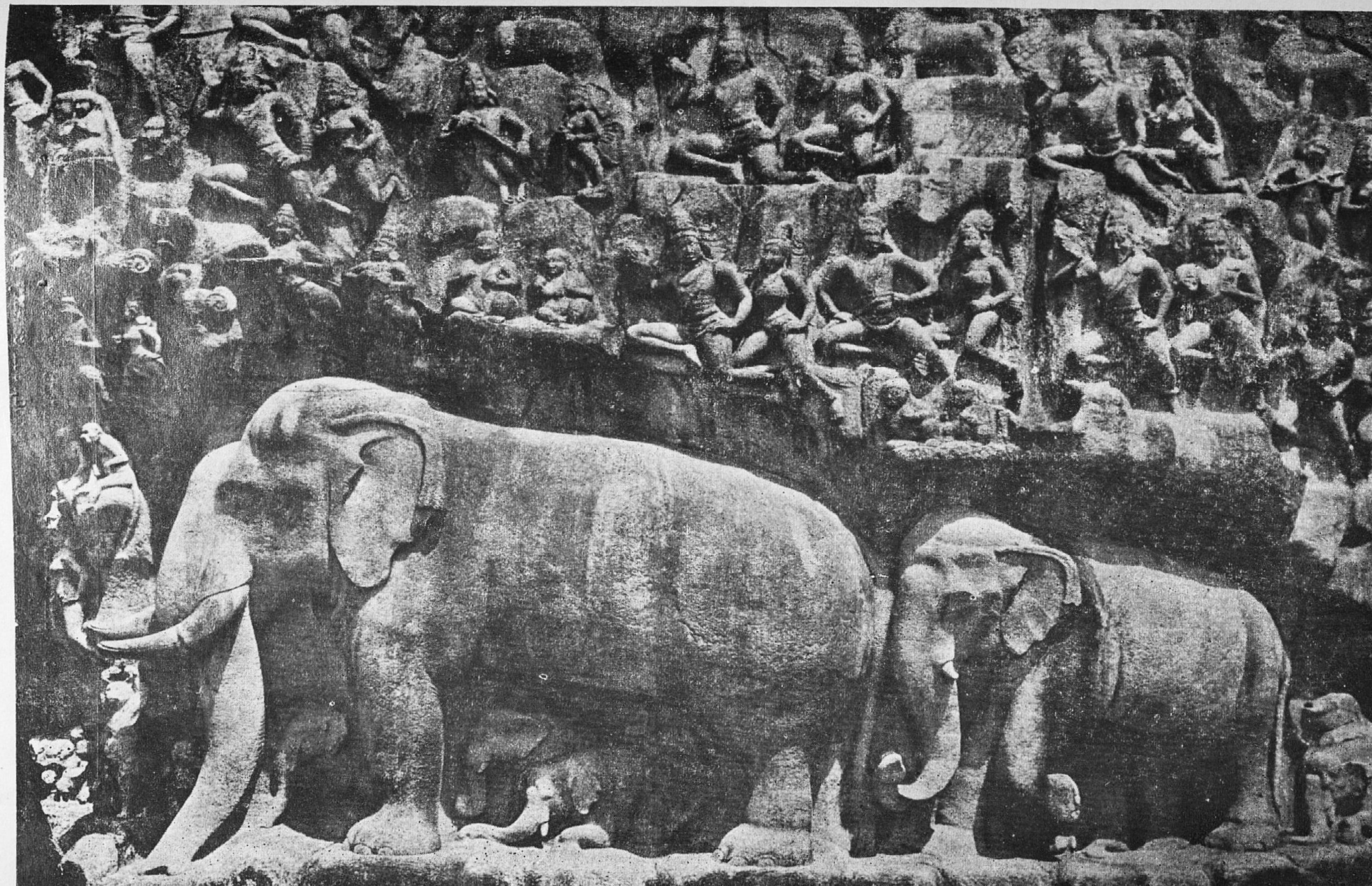


a. Arjuna's penance

b. A pretentious cat

54. Mamallapuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A. D.





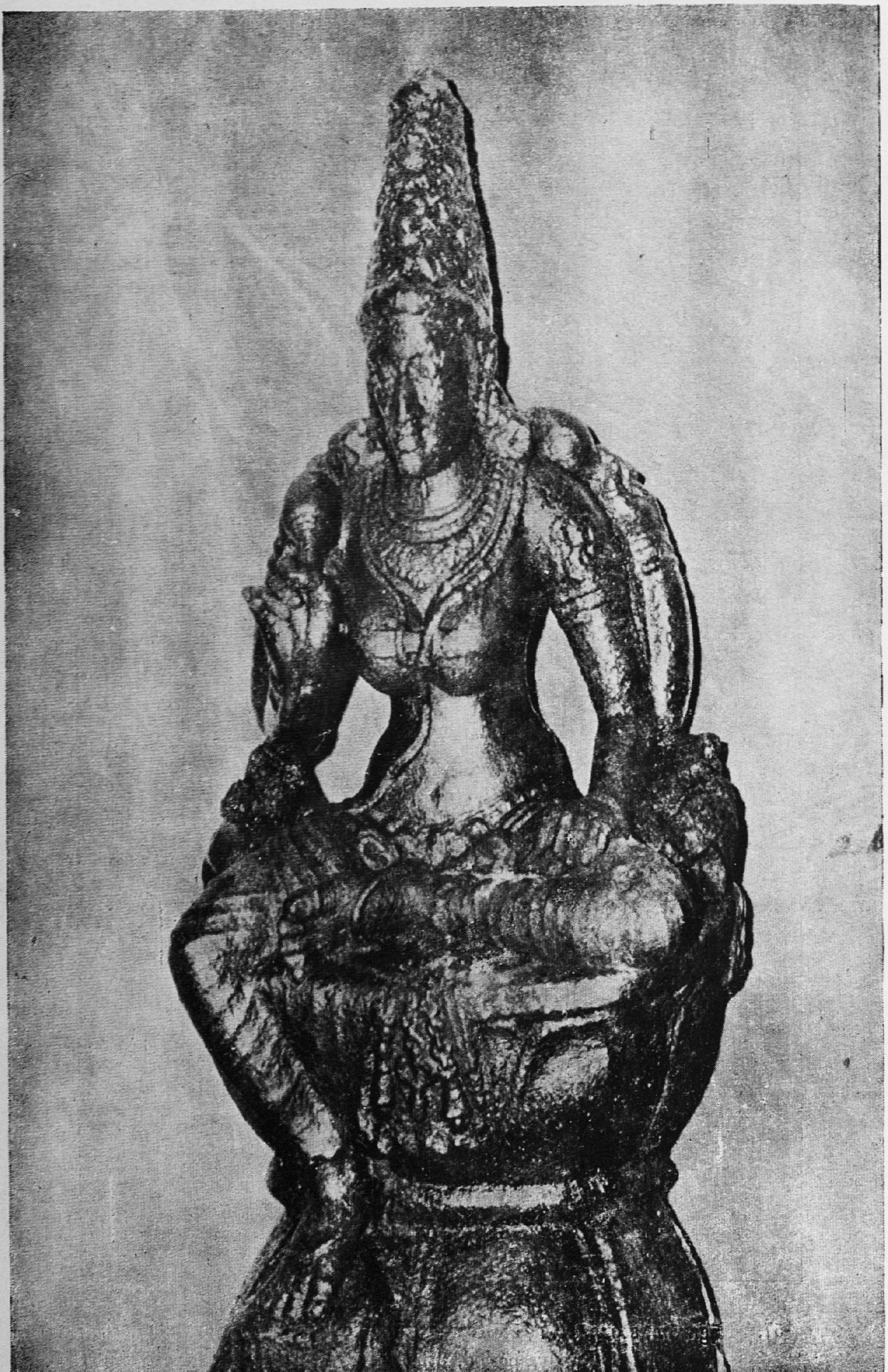
55. A scene from Arjuna's penence, Mamallapuram, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A. D.



56. Manmatha and Rati, stone, Sundaravarada temple, Uttaramerūr, District Chingleput, Pallava period, 8th century A. D.



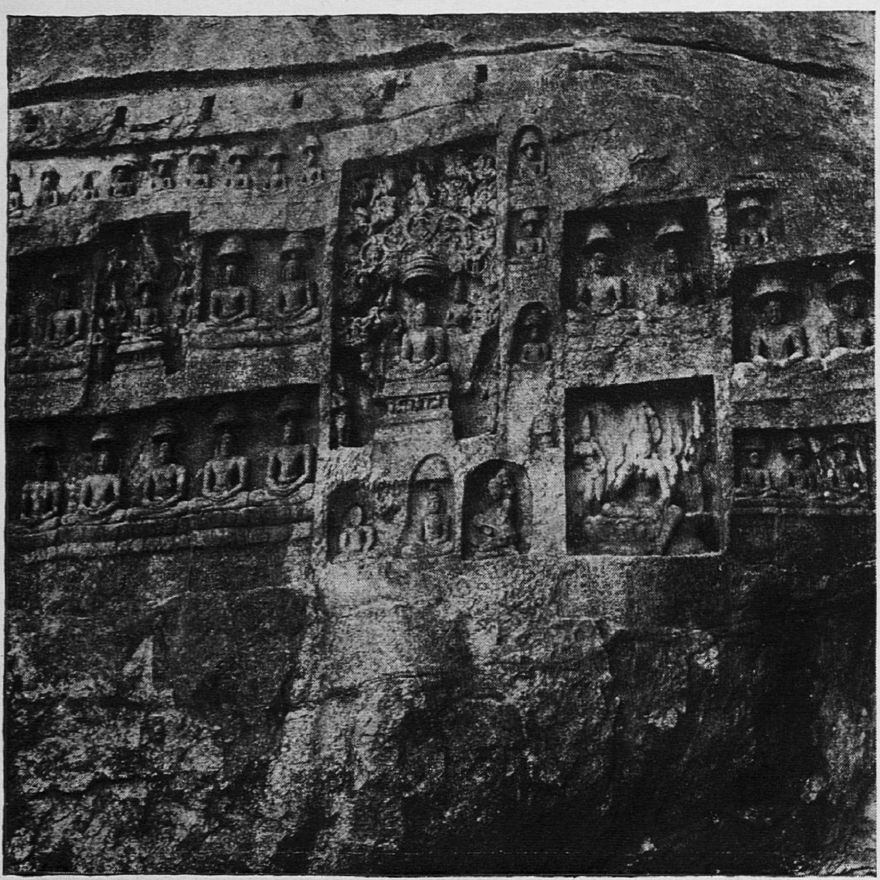
57. Nāgarāja, stone, Nāgarāja temple, Nagarkoil, District Kanyakumari, Pandya period, 8th century A. D.



58. Srīdēvi, stone, Śiva temple, Thiruchuli, District Ramanathapuram, Pandya period, 8th century A.D.



59. Dancing Śiva and Pārvati, stone, Subrahmaṇya temple, Thirupparankunram, District Madurai, Pandya period, 8th century A.D.



60. A group of Jain images carved on a rockface, Kalugumalai, District Thirunelveli, Pandya period, 8th century A.D.



61. Śiva as Dakshiṇāmūrti in the monolith Veṭṭuvānkōil, Kalugumalai, District Thirunelveli, Pandya period, 8th century A. D.



62. Vishṇu as Narasimha in the excavated cave, Namakkal, District Salem, Atiya period, 8th century A.D.



63. Vishnu as Varāha in the excavated cave, Namakkal, District Salem,
Atiya period, 8th century A.D.



64. Vishṇu as Ādinātha in the excavated cave, Namakkal, District Salem, Atiya period, 8th century A.D.



65. a. Portrait of a Chōḷa king.

Stone, Koraṅganātha temple, Srinivasanallur, District Trichy, Chola period, 9th century A.D.



b. Portrait of a Queen.





b. Brahmā, stone, Nāgēśvara temple, Kumbakonam, District Tanjore, Chola period, 9th century A.D.

66. a. Subrahmaṇya, stone, Avanikandarpa Īswara gṛham, Perumpaluvur, District Trichy, 9th century A.D.



67. a. Portrait of a Queen,

Stone, Nāgēśvara temple, Kumbakonam, District Tanjore, Chola period, 9th century A.D.



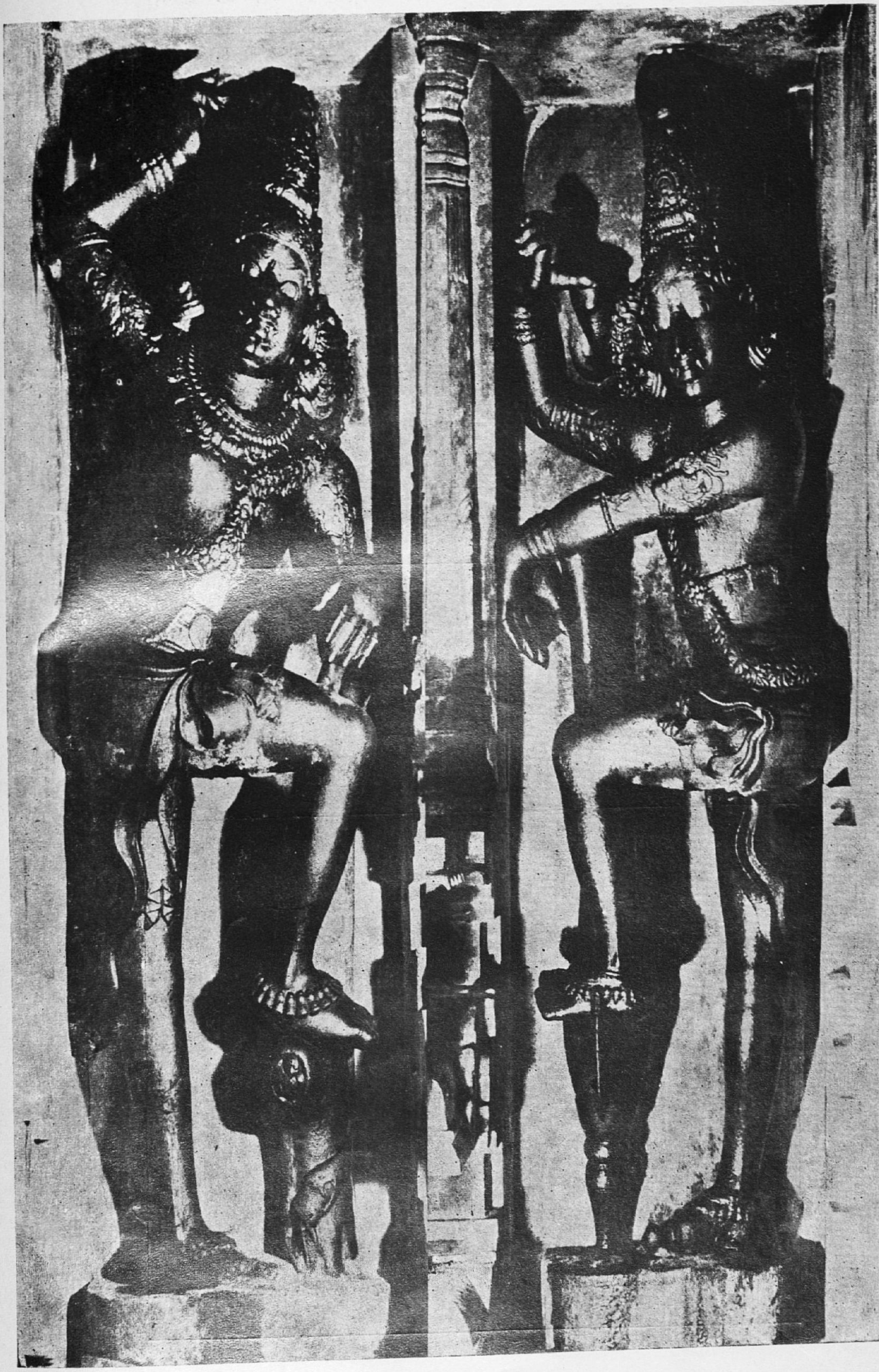
b. Portrait of a Queen.



68. a. Śiva, stone, Śiva temple, Erumbur, District South Arcot, Chola period, 10th century A.D.

b. Brahmā, stone, Śiva temple, Punjai, District Tanjore, Chola period, 10th century A.D.





69. Dvārapālas, stone, Mayūranātha temple, Mayuram, District Thanjavur, Early Chola period, 10th century A. D.

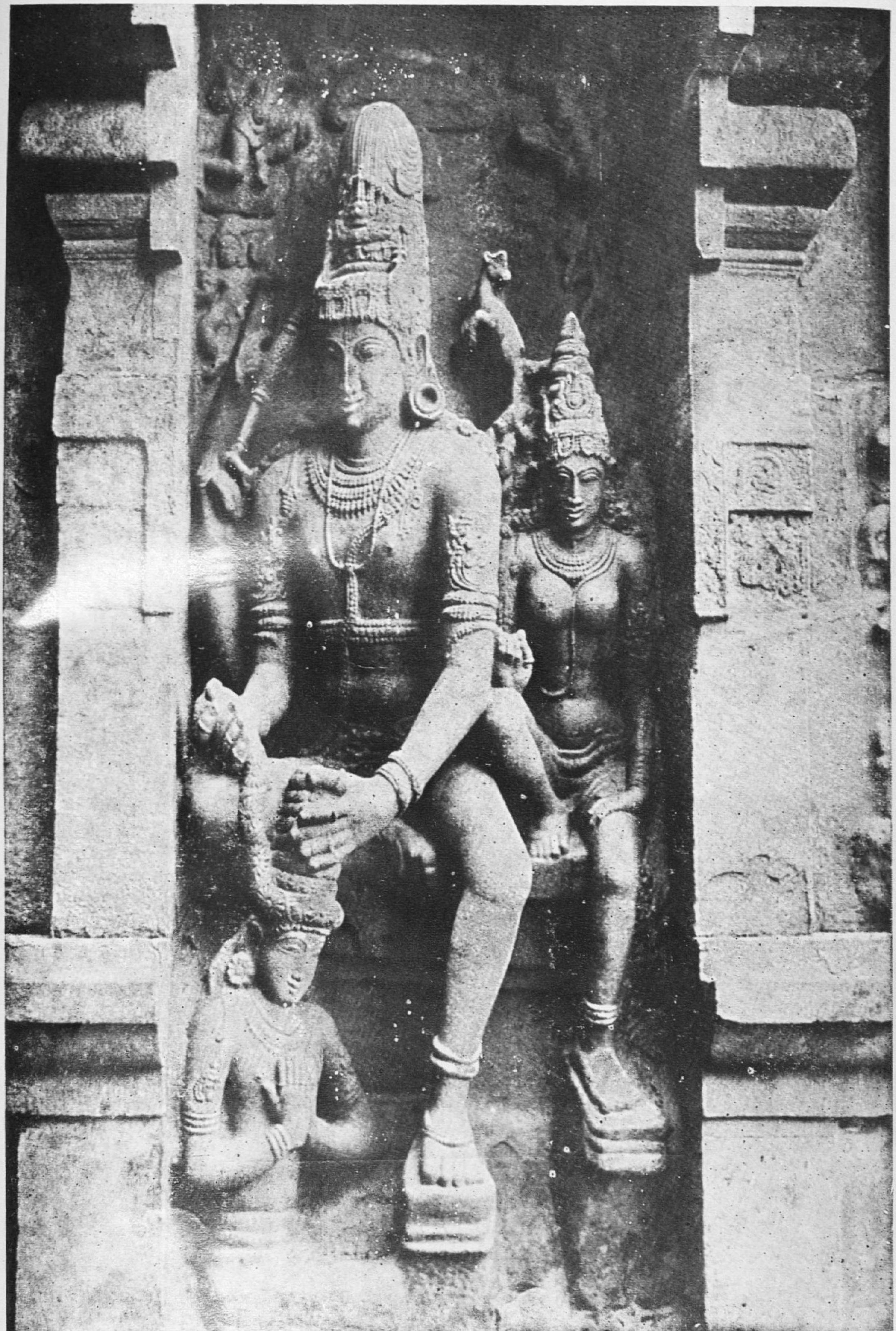


a. Naṭarāja

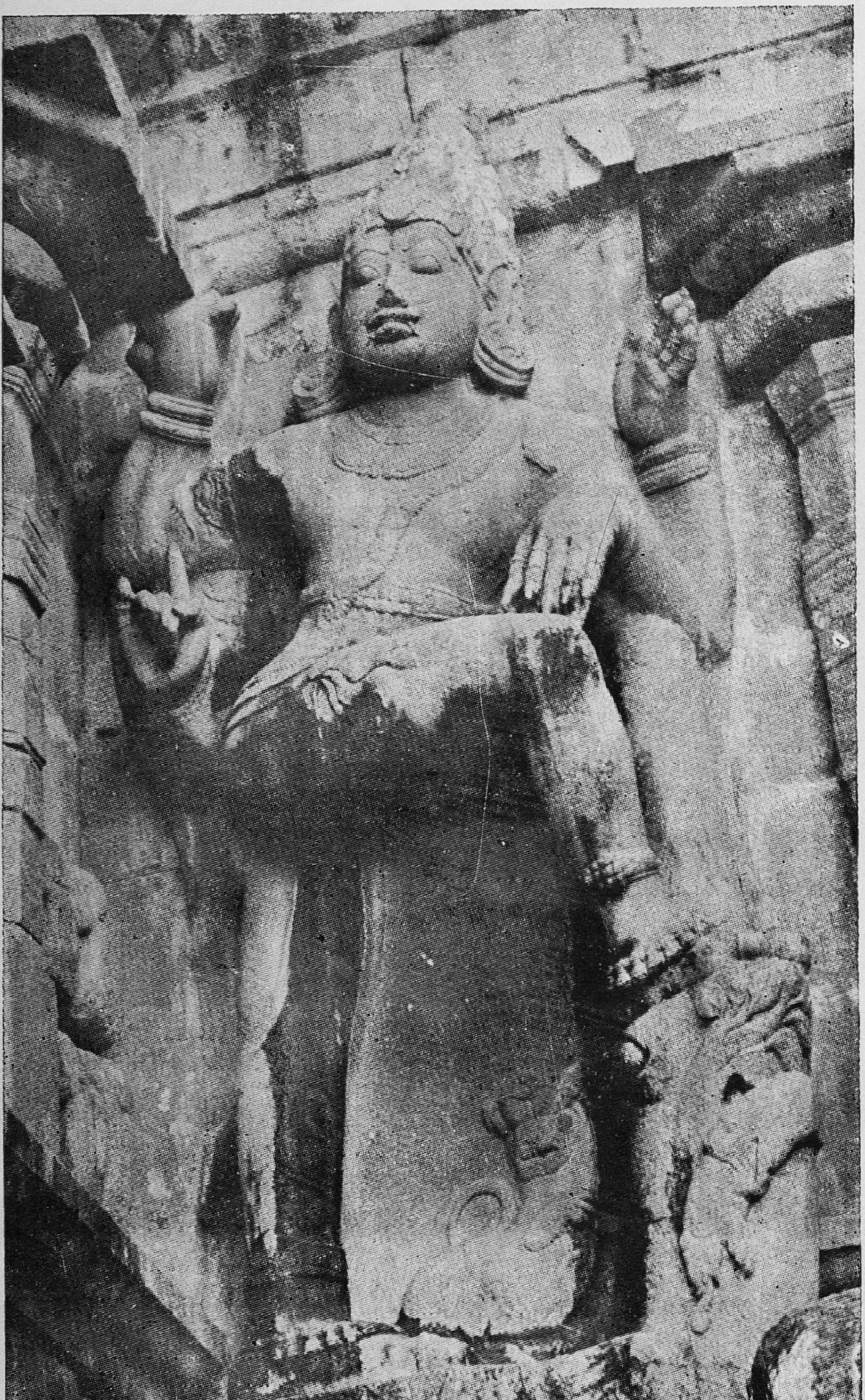


b. Ardhanāri

70. Siva temple, Gangaikōṇḍachōḷapuram, District Thiruchi, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



71. Śiva as Chandēśānugrahamūrti, stone, Siva temple, Gangaikōṇdachōlapuram, District Thiruchi, Chōla period, 11th century A.D.



72. Dvārapāla, stone, Siva temple, Gangaikōṇdachōlapuram, District Thiruchi, Chōla period, 11th century A.D.



73. Śiva as Gajasamhāra, stone, Śiva temple, Darasuram, District Tanjore, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



74. a. Śiva as Kaṅkāḷa, stone, Darasuram, District Tanjore, Chola period, 12th century A.D.

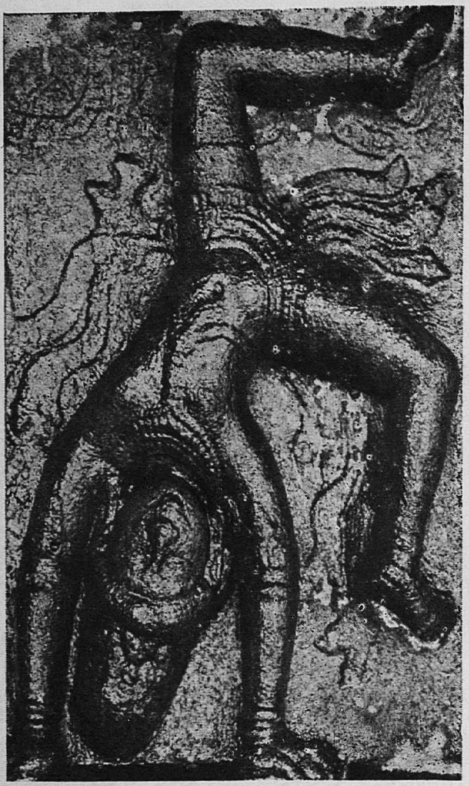
b. Koḍippeṇ, stone, Kampaharēśvara temple, Tribhuvanam, District Tanjore, Chola period, 13th century A.D.





75. Dancing Karanas,
Sāraṅgapāṇi temple, Kumbakonam,
District Tanjore, Later chola period,
13th century A.D.

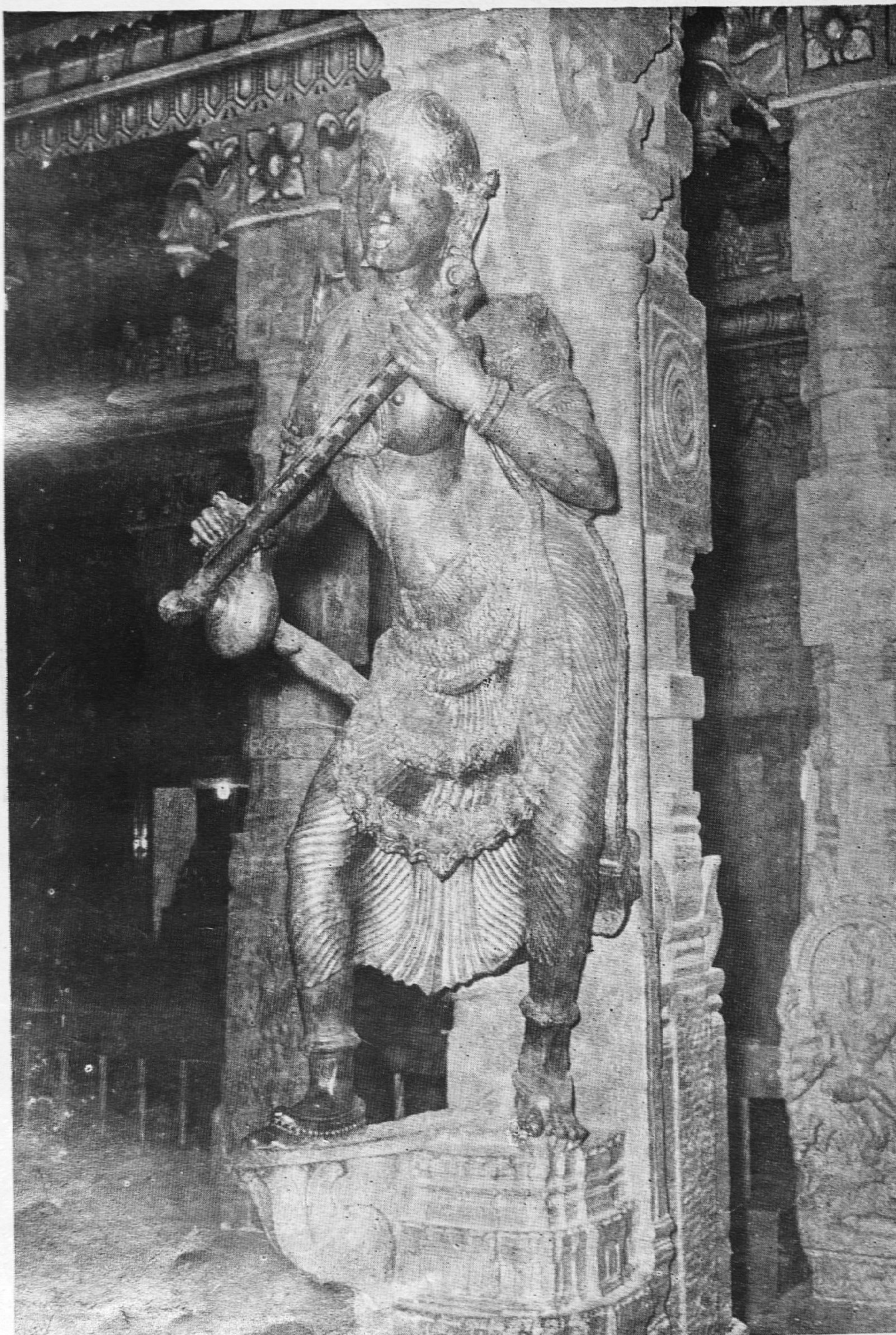


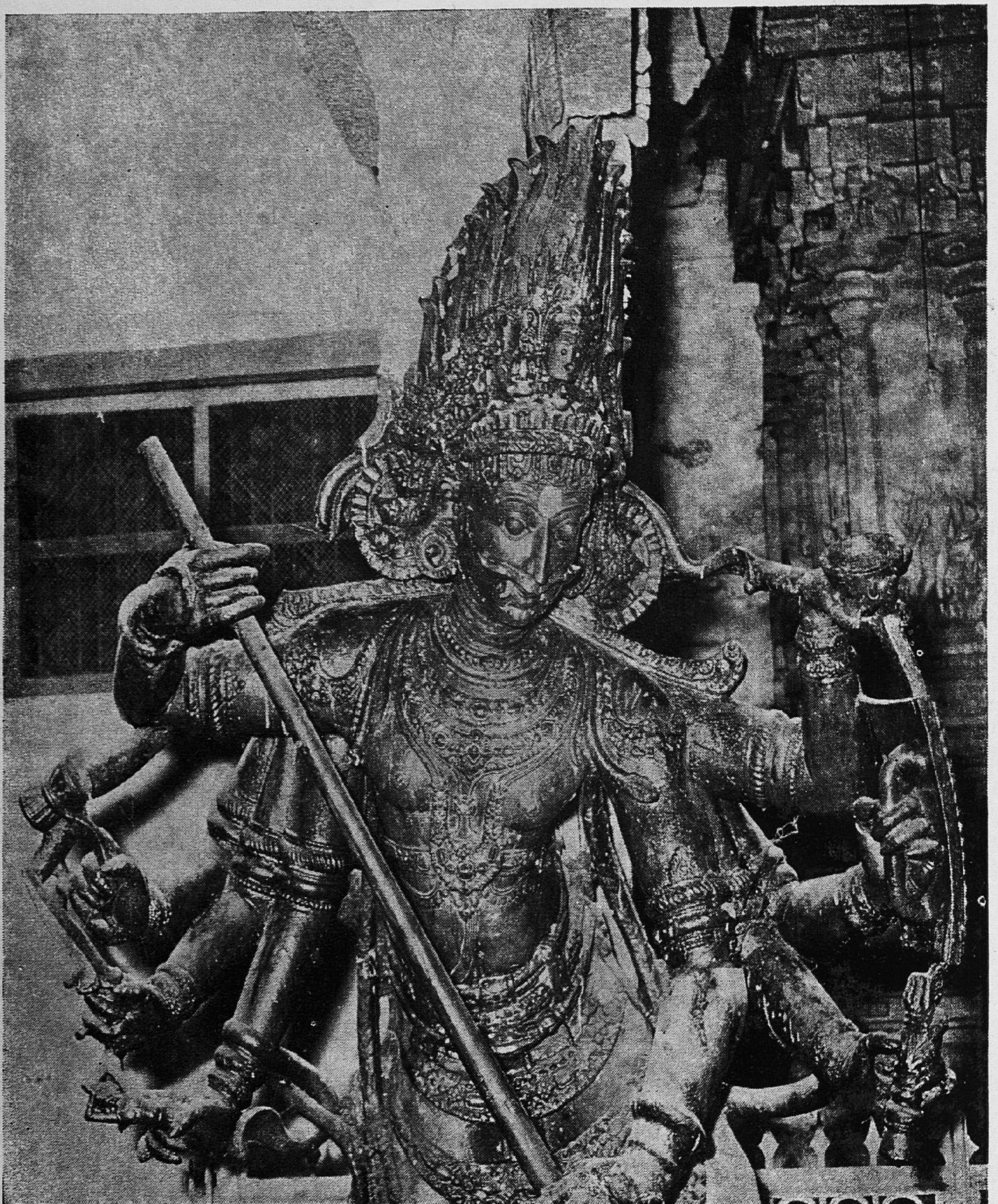


76. Dancing Karanas,
Sārangapāṇi temple, Kumbakonam,
District Tanjore, Later chola period,
13th century A.D.



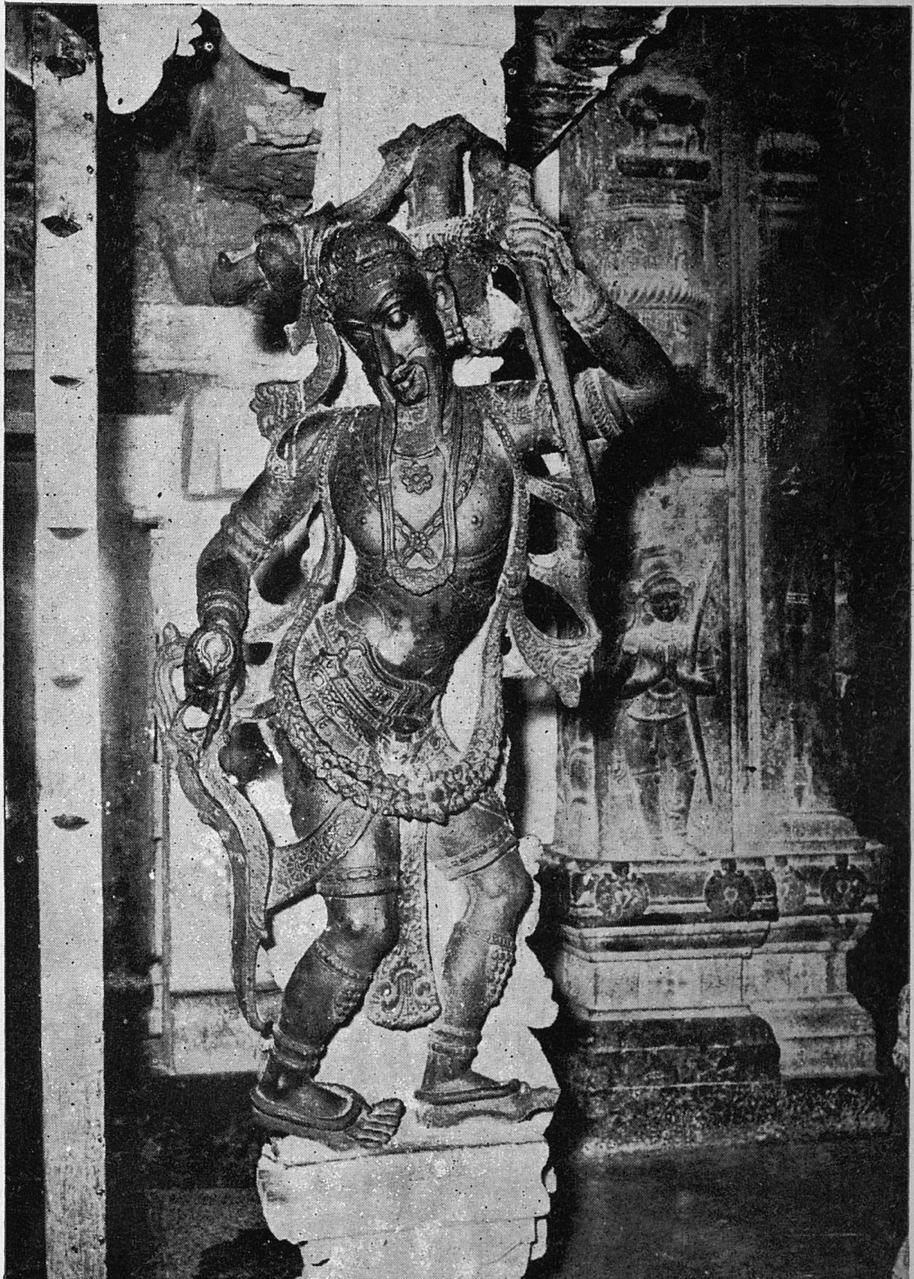
77. A musician, stone, Mīnākshi temple, Madurai, District Madurai, Nayak period, 16th century A. D.

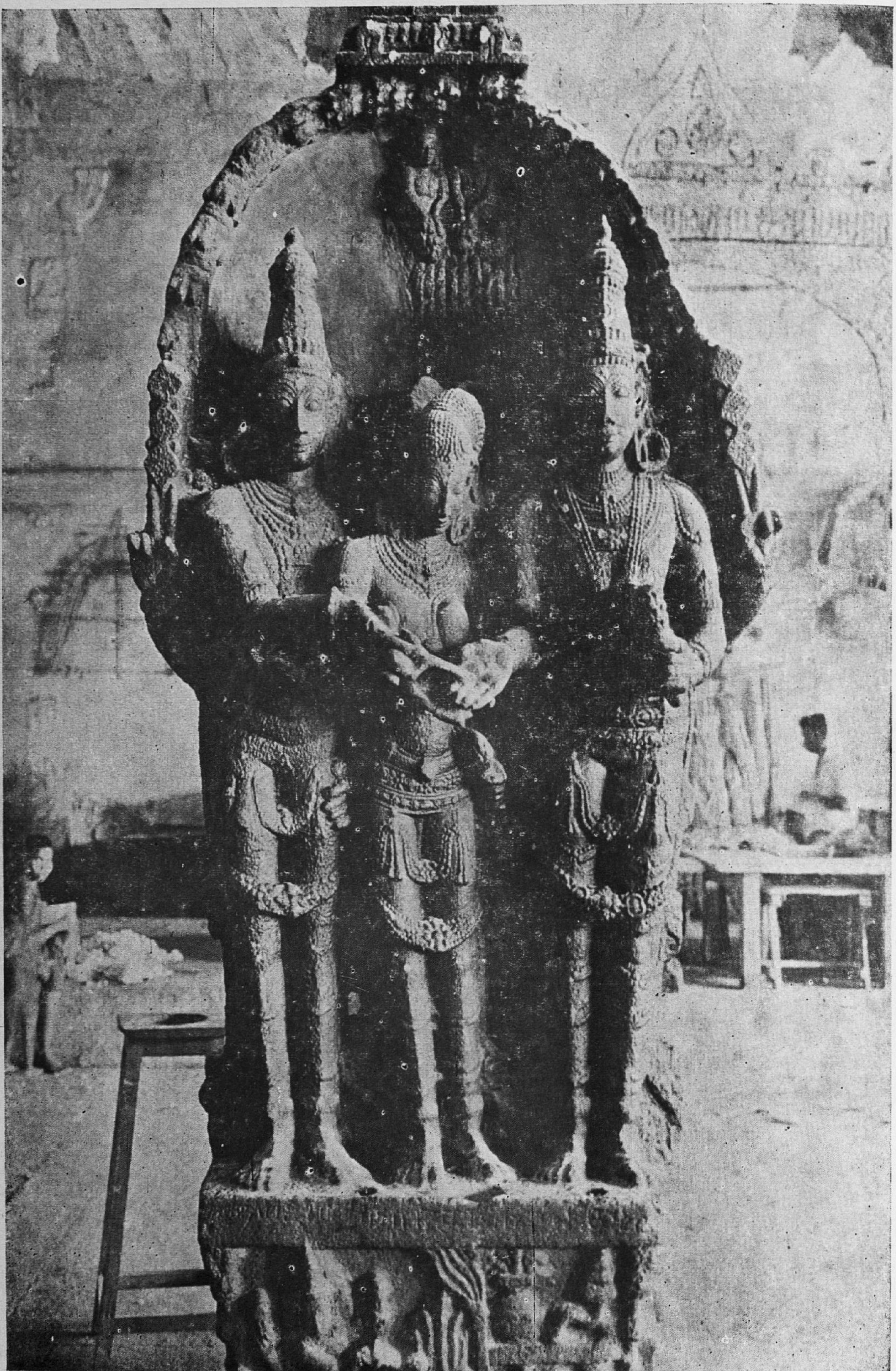




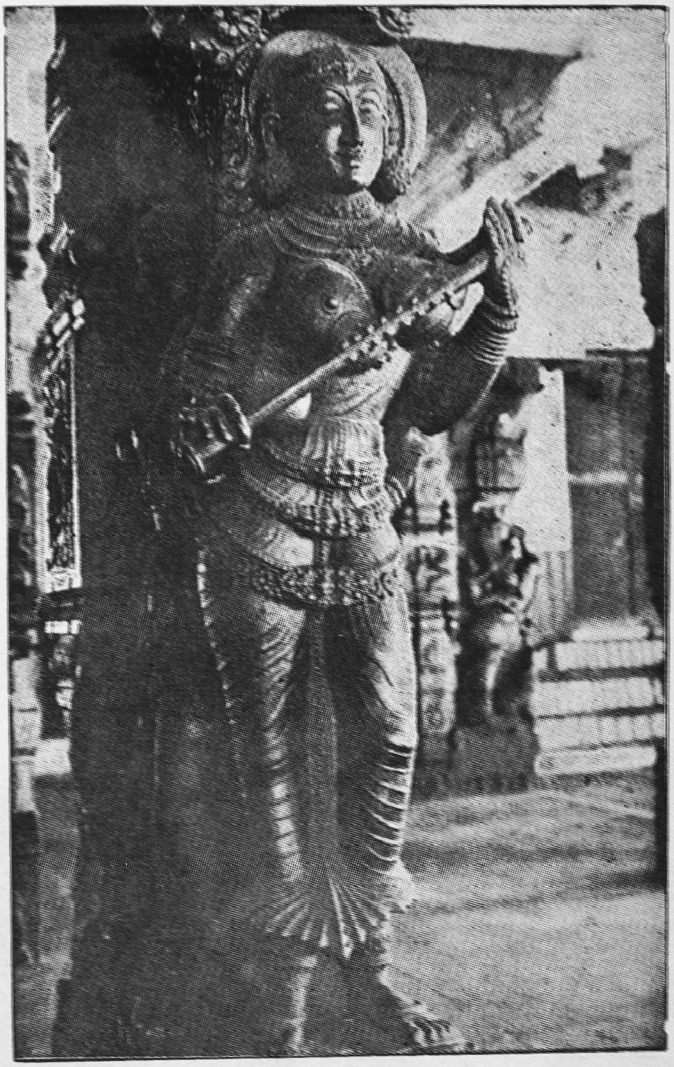
78. Vīrabhadra, Mīnākshi temple, Madurai, District Madurai, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.

79. A soldier, Thānumālaya perumāl temple, Suchindram, District Kanyakumari, Nayak period, 17th century A. D.



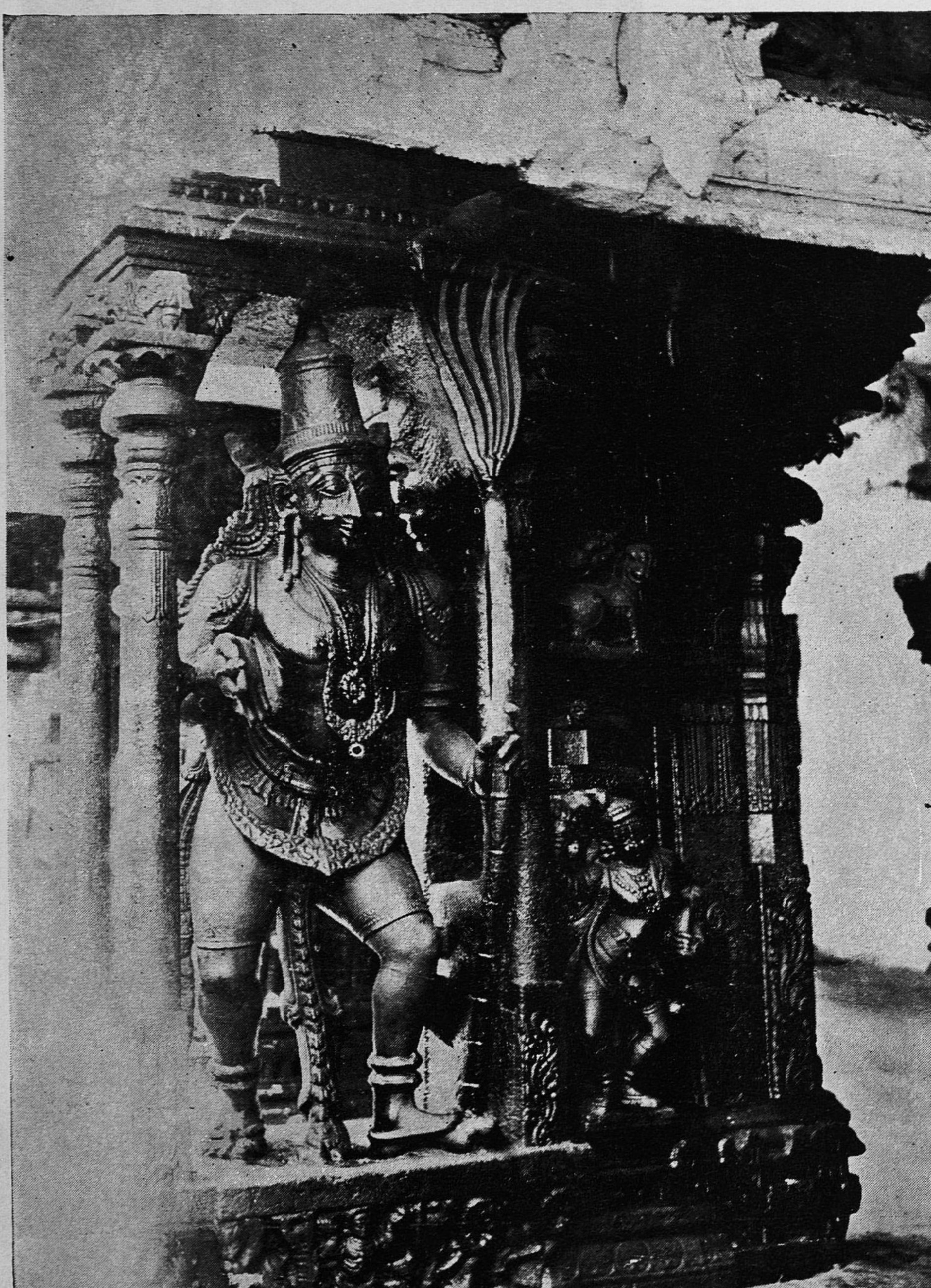


80. Marriage of Subrahmaṇya with Dēvayānai, Subrahmanya temple, Thirupparankunram, District Madurai, Nayak period, 18th century A. D.

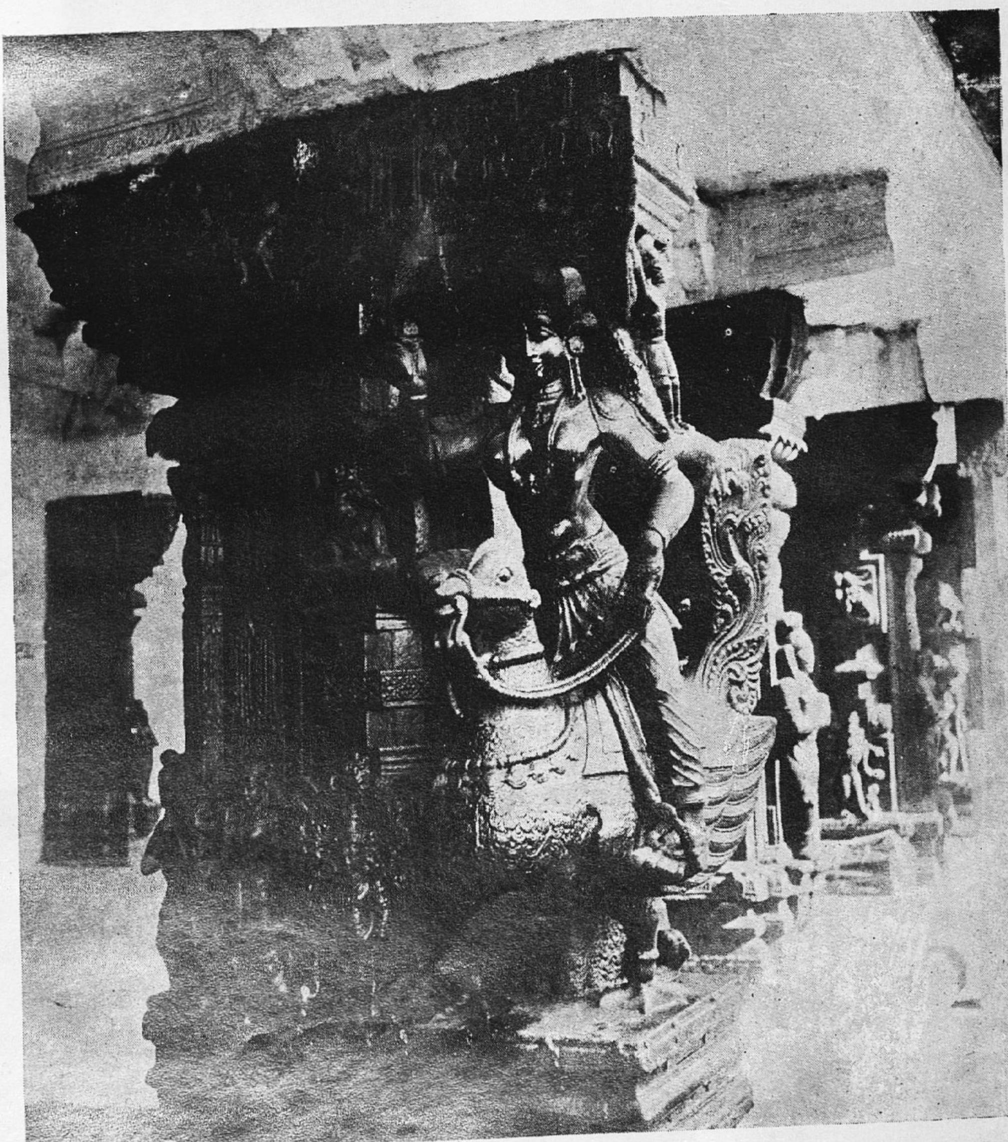


81. Vīṇādhārini, Rāmaswāmi Temple, Kumbakonam, District Tanjore, Nayak period, 17th century A.D.

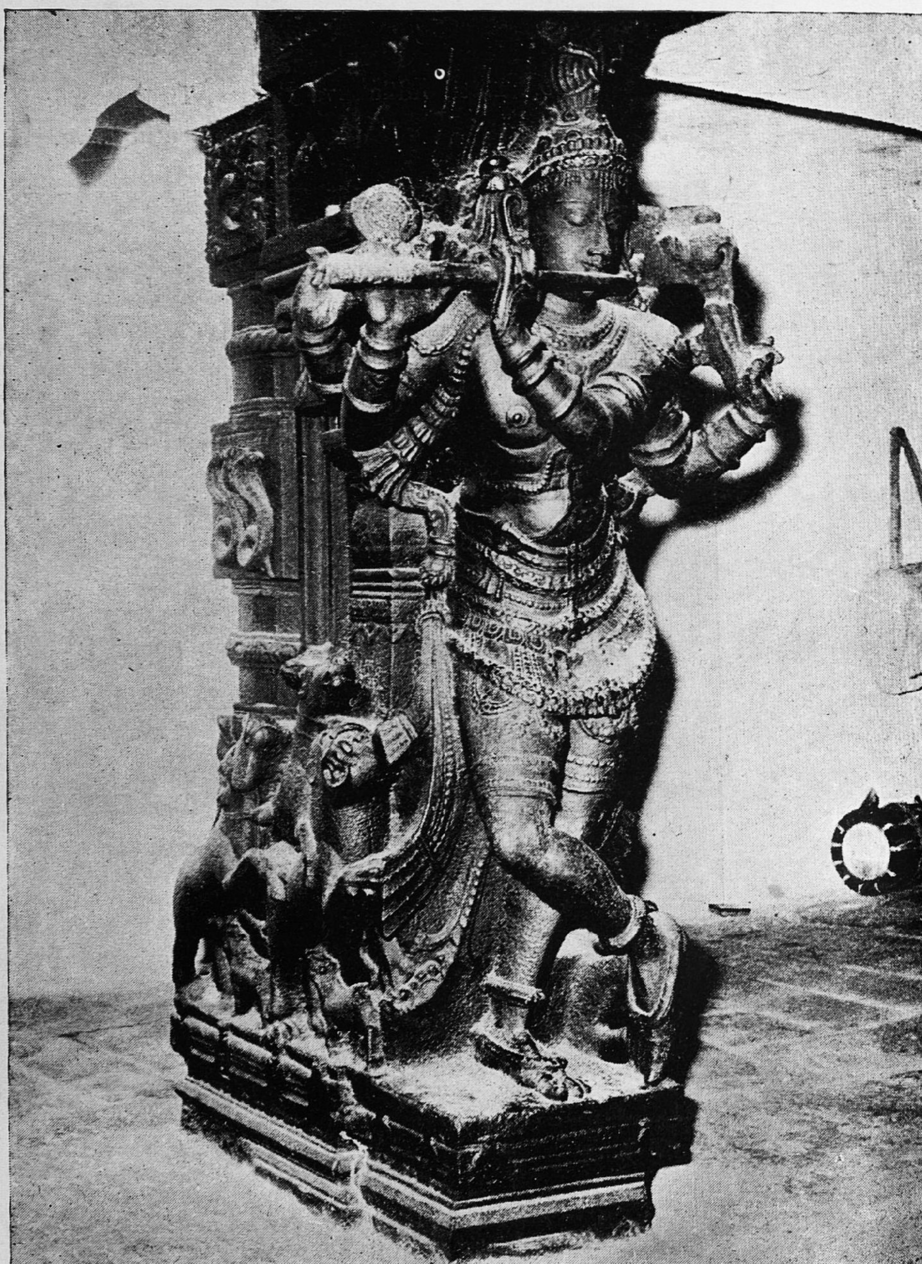
8 Manmatha, Ādikēsava temple, Thiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari, 16th century A. D.



83. Rati, Ādikesava temple, Tiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari, 16th century A.D.



84. Vēṇugōpāla, Ādikesava temple, Tiruvattaru, District Kanyakumari, 16th century A.D.





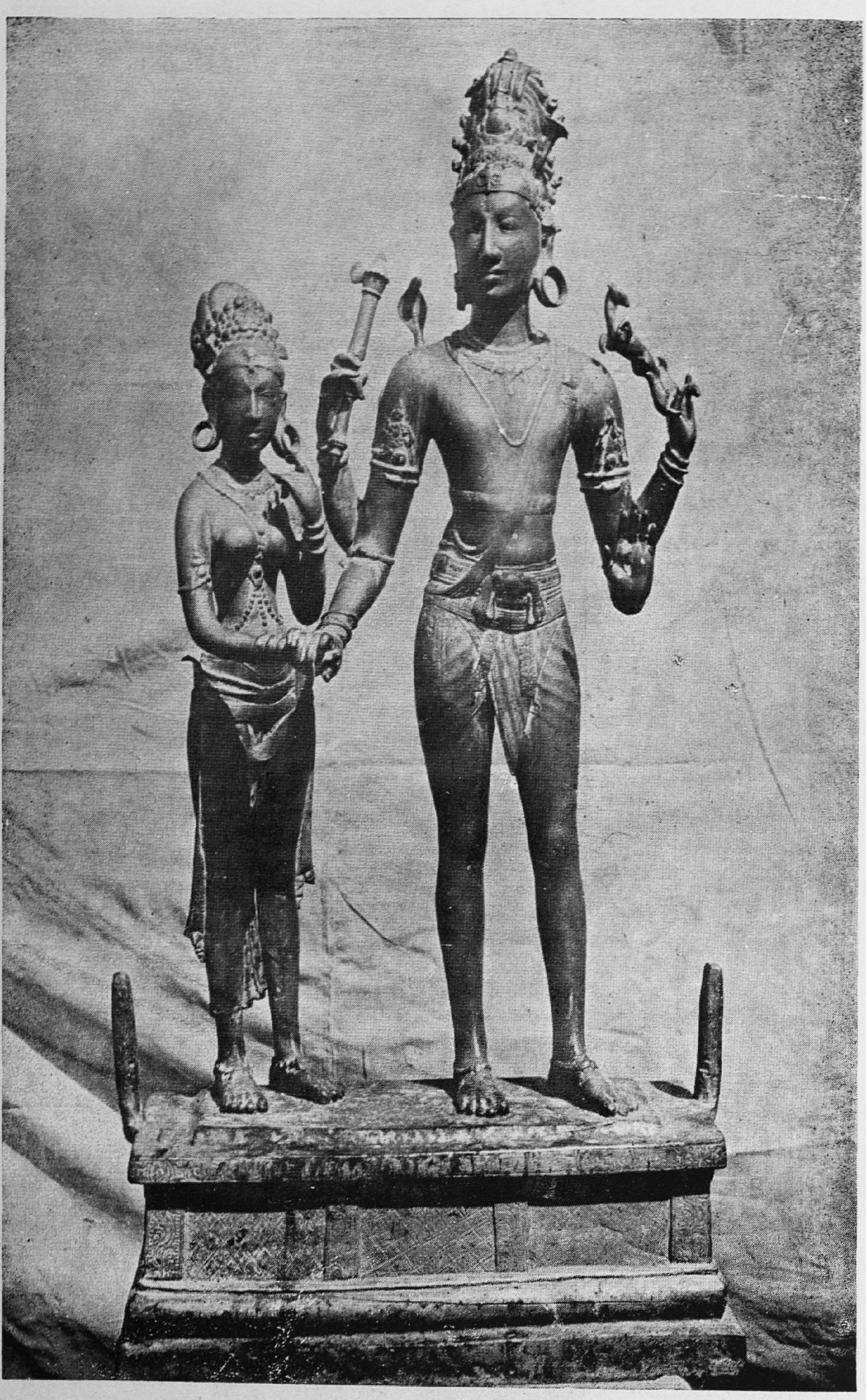
85. Śiva-Naṭarāja, Bronze, Kuram, now in the Madras Museum, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



86. Bōdhisatva-Maitrēya, Bronze,
Gold gilded, Kaveripoompattinam,
(Melaiyur), District Tanjore, Pallava period,
8th century A.D.

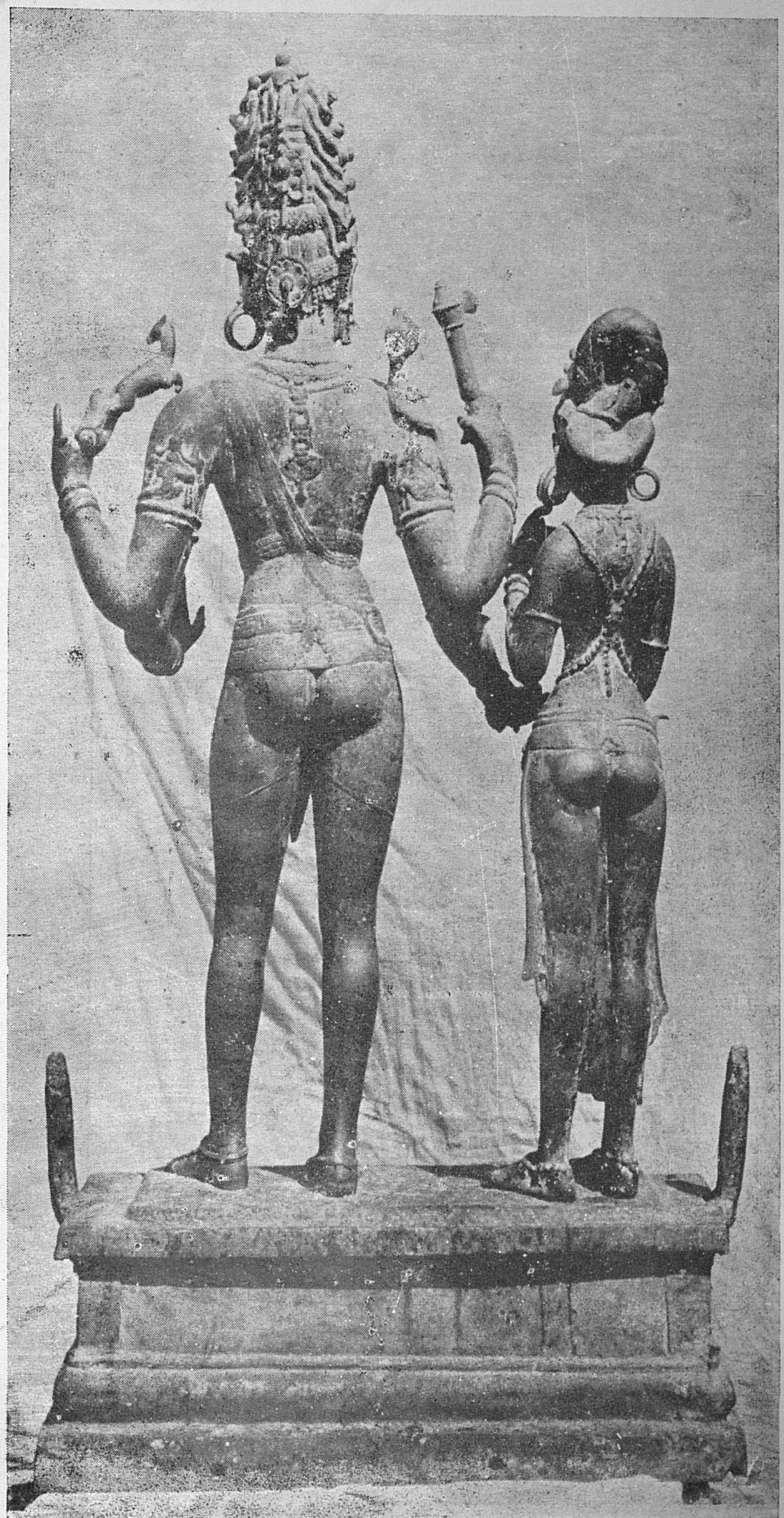


87. Vishṇu, Bronze, Makuṭēśvara temple, Kodumudi, District Coimbatore, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



88. Śiva as Kalyāṇasundara, Front-view, Bronze, Vadakkalattur, District Tanjore, Pallava period, 9th century A.D.

89. Śiva as Kalyāṇasundara, Back-view, Bronze, Vadakkalattur, District Tanjore, Pallava Period, 9th Century A.D.



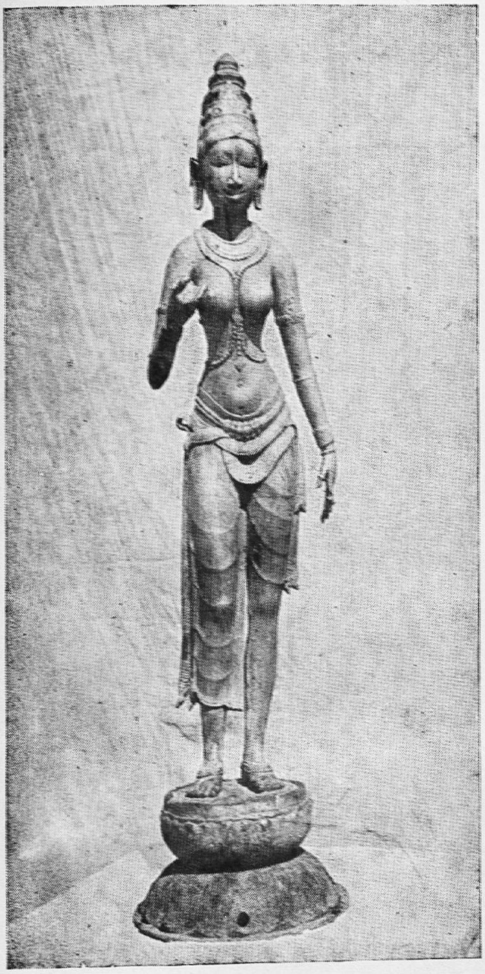


Front-view

90. Śiva as Naṭarāja, Bronze, Vadakkalattur, District Tanjore, Pallava period, 9th century A.D.

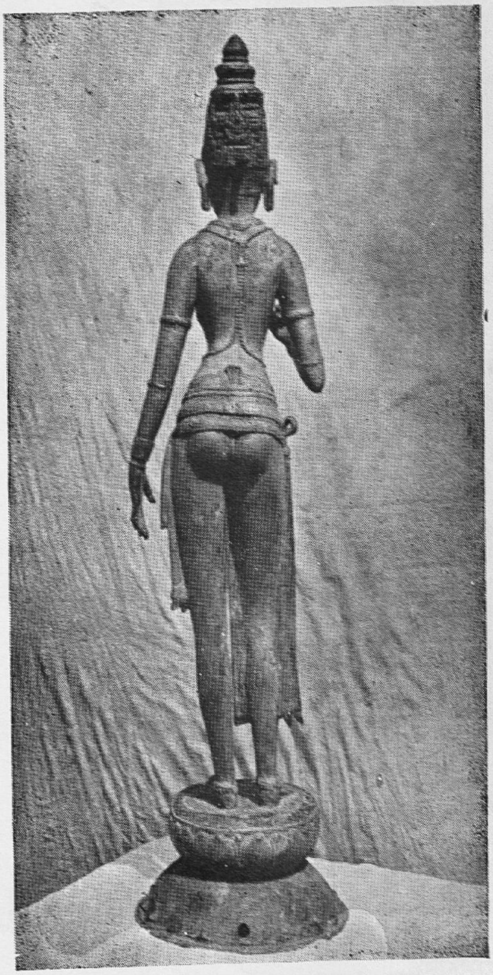


Back-view



Front-view

91. Pārvathi, Bronze, Vadakkalattur,
District Tanjore, Pallava period,
9th century A.D.



Back-view

92. Naṭarāja, Bronze, Śiva Temple, Nallur, District Tanjore, Early Chola Period, 9th Century A.D.

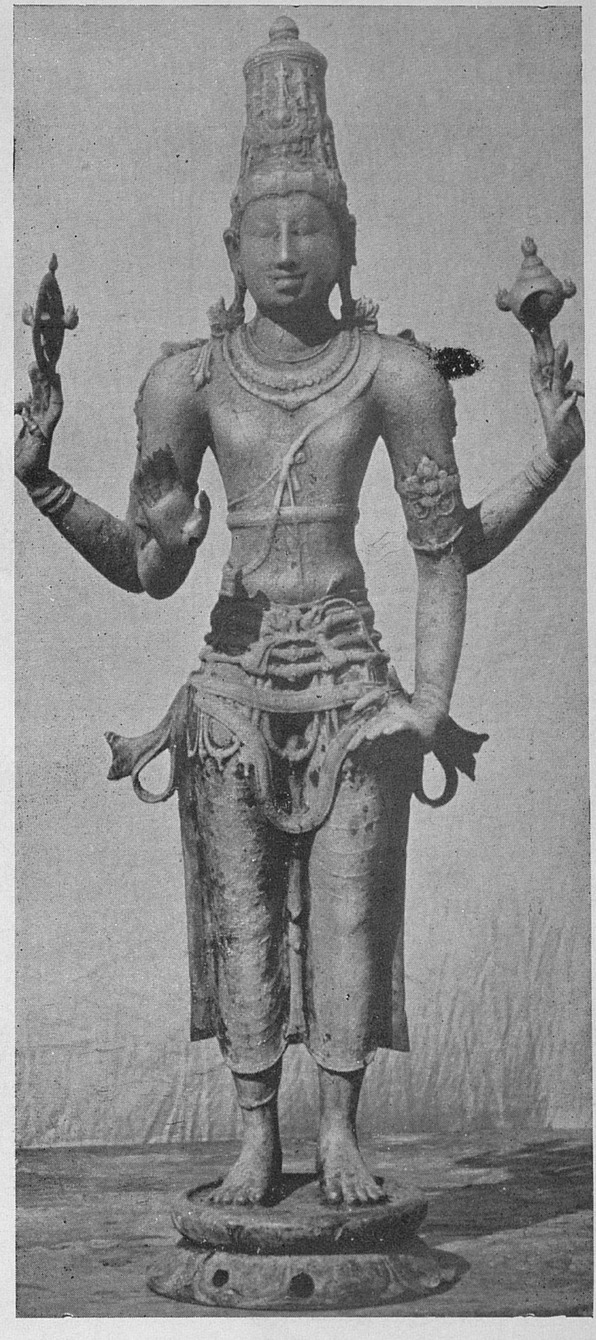


93. Pārvathi as Umā with Skanda, Bronze, Śiva Temple, Pallavaneswaram, District Tanjore, Early Chola Period, 9th Century A.D.



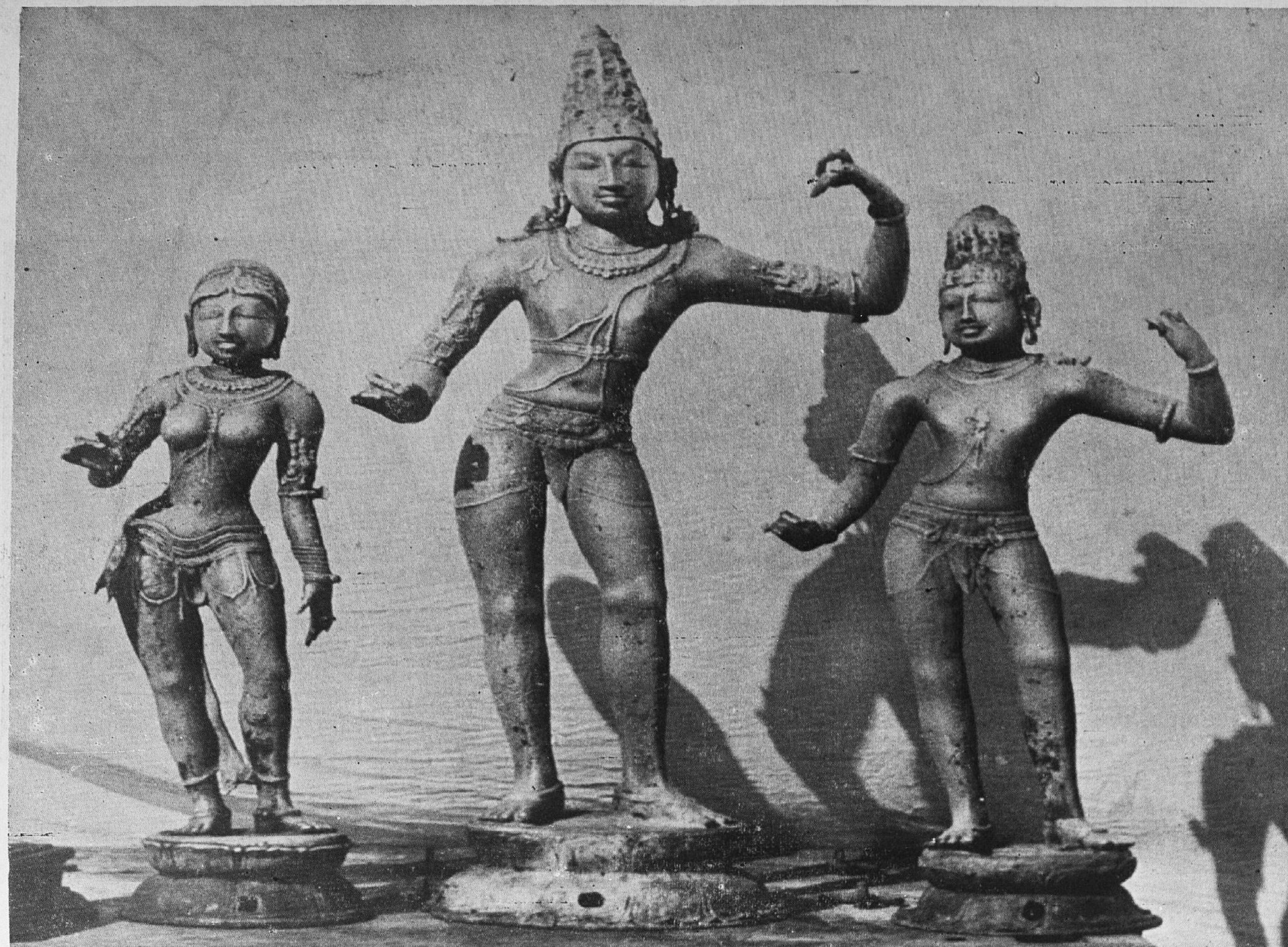


94. Śiva, Bronze, Tanjore Art Gallery, Early Chola period, 9th century A.D.



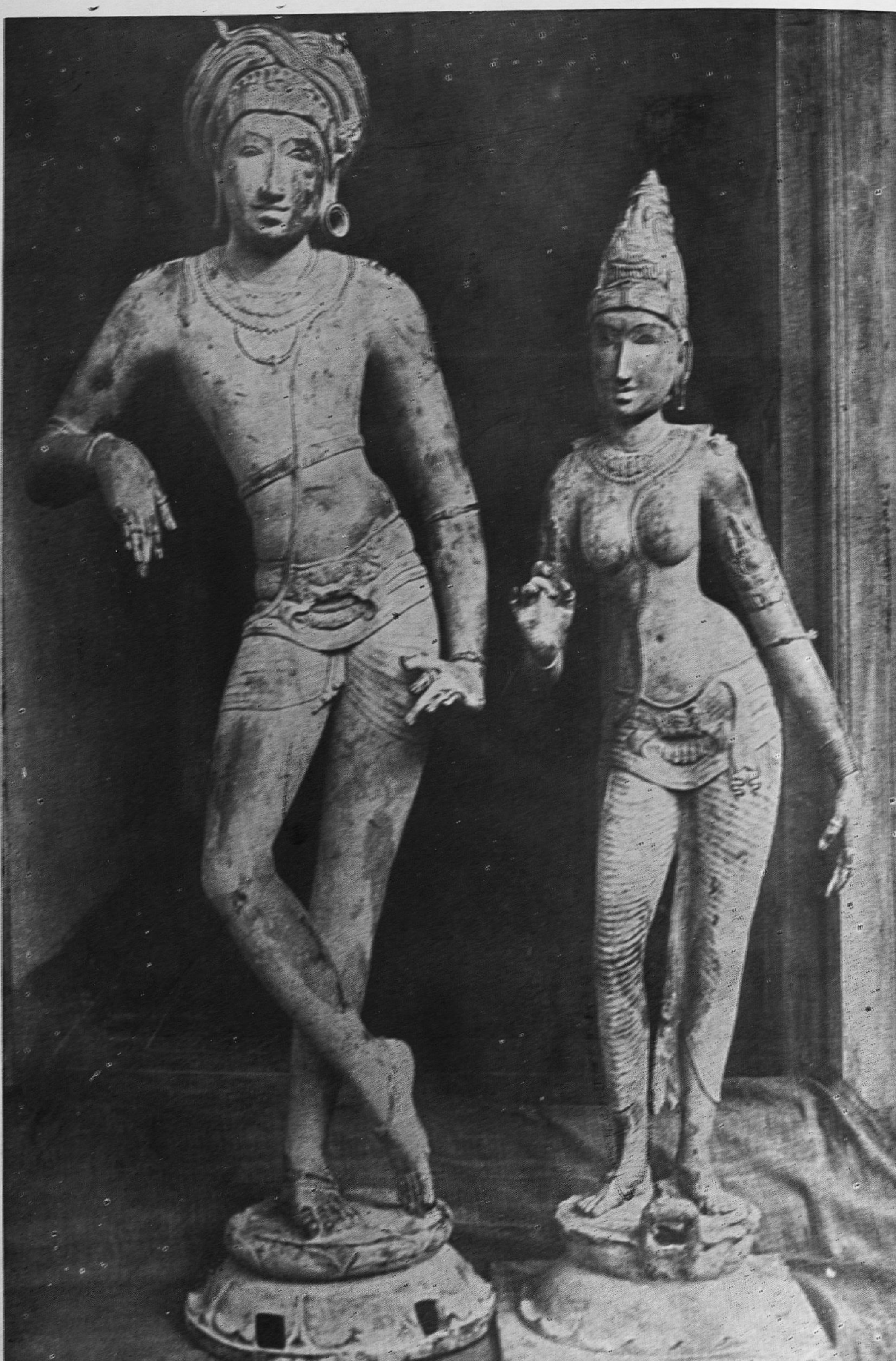
95. Vishṇu, Bronze, Parutthiyur, District Tanjore, Early Chola period, 10th century A.D.

96. Rāma, Lakshmaṇa, Sīta and Hanumān, Bronze, Vishṇu Temple, Parutthiyur, District Tanjore, Early Chola Period, 10th Century A.D.

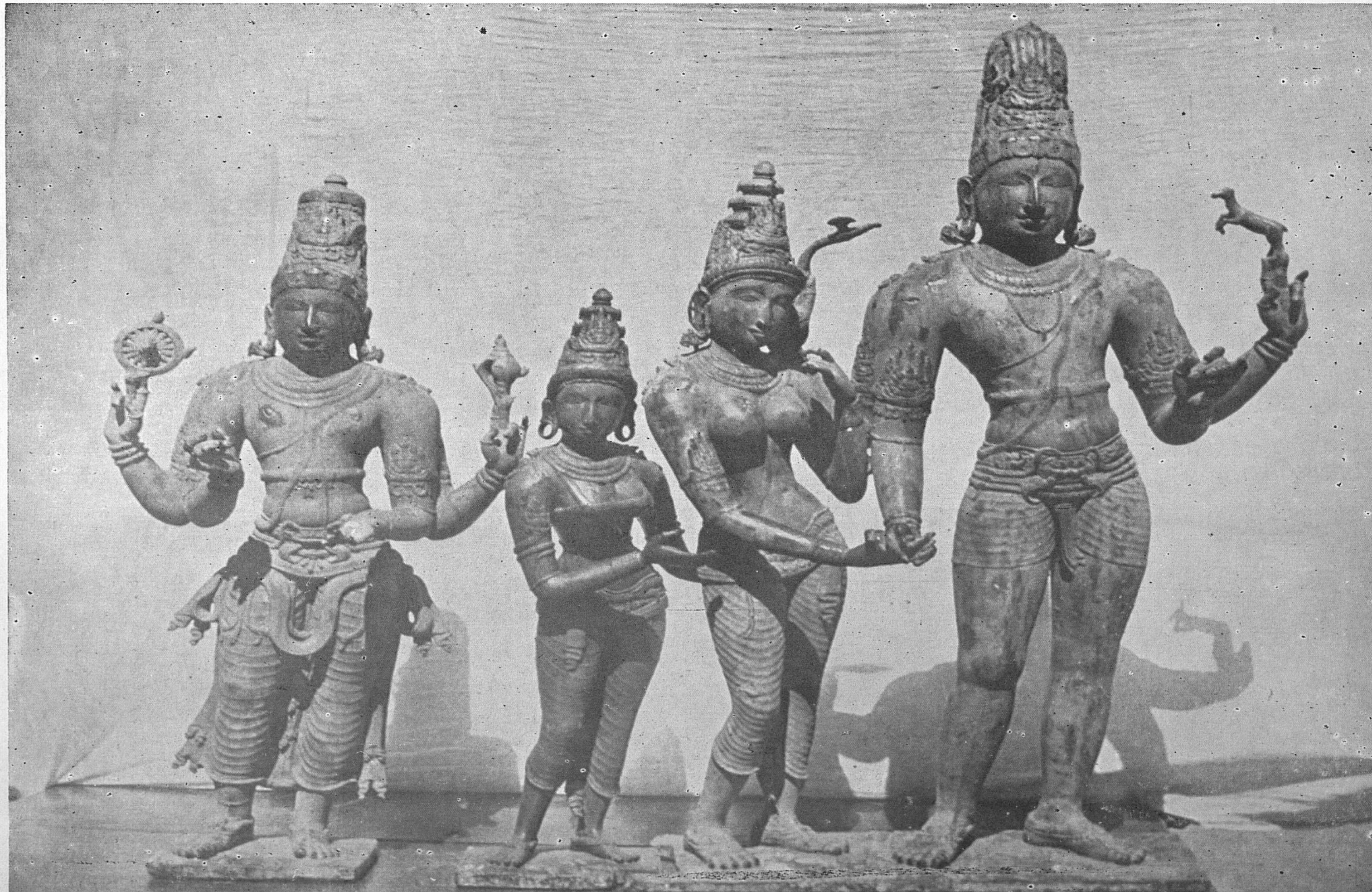




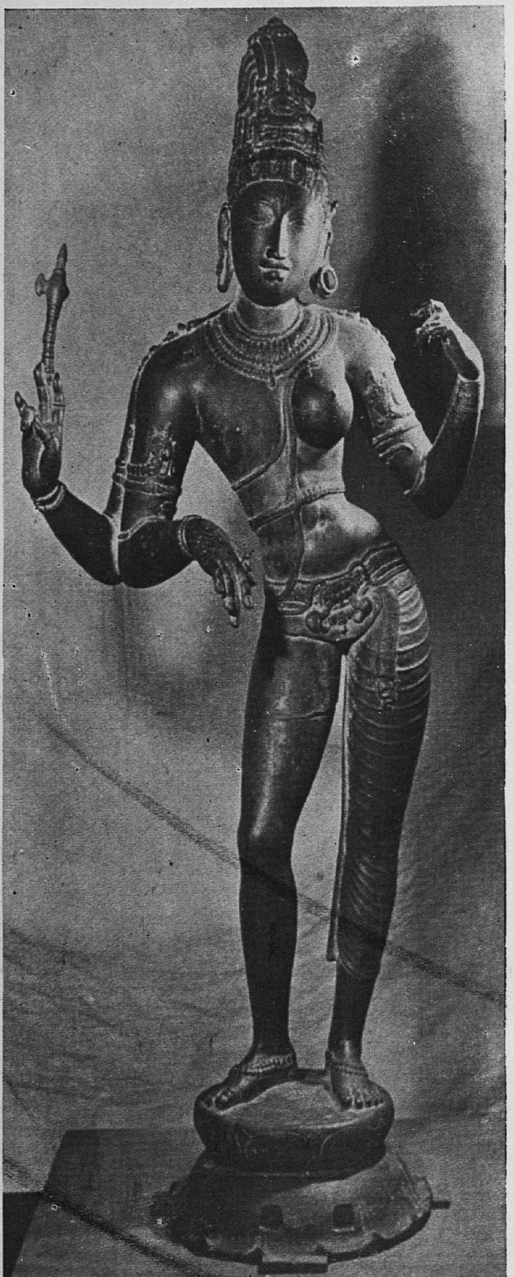
97. Naṭarāja, Bronze, Śiva Temple, Kodumudi, District Coimbatore, Early Chola period, 10th century A.D.



98. Vṛshavāhana, Bronze, Tiruvenkadu, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



99 Kalyāṇasundara, Bronze, Tiruvenkadu, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



Front-view

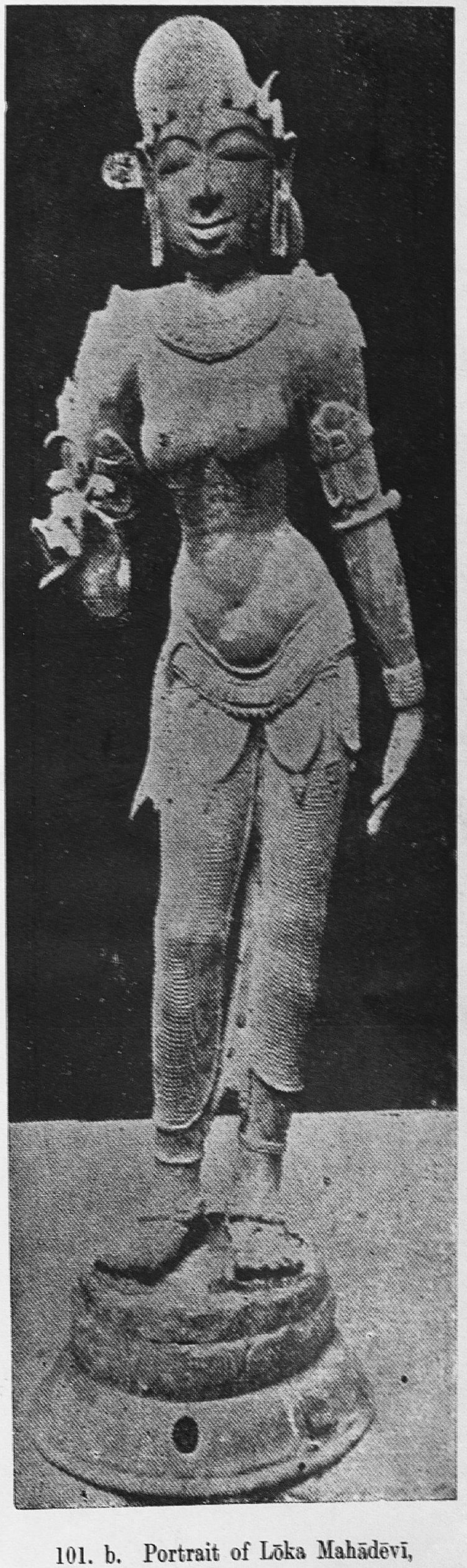
100. Ardhanārīśvara, Bronze, Tiruvenkadu,
District Tanjore, Chola period,
11th century A.D.



Back-view



101. a. Portrait of Rāja Rāja Chōḻa, Bronze, Originally in the great temple of Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.

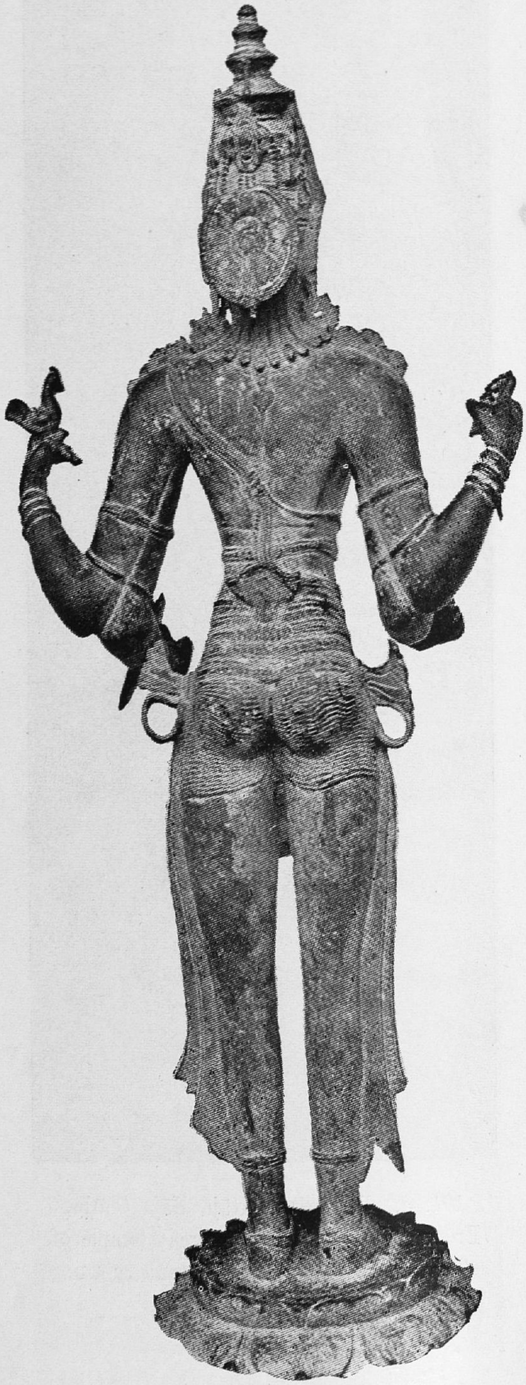


101. b. Portrait of Lōka Mahādēvī, Bronze, Chola period 11th century A.D.



Front-view

102. Subrahmaṇya, Bronze, Great temple Gangaikondacholapuram, District Trichy, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



Back-view



103. a. Durga, Bronze, Great temple, Gangaikondacholapuram, District Trichy, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



103. b. Vīṇādhara Bikshāṭana, Bronze, Melapperumpallam, District Tanjore, Chola period, 12th century A.D.



a. Chandraśēkara

104. Bronze, Virapandi, District Madurai, Later Pandya period, 14th century A.D.



b. Naṭarāja



105. a. Hanumān, Vishṇu temple, Sadaras, District Chingleput, Vijayanagara period, 15th century A.D.

105. b. Viḷakku Nāchchiyār, Bronze, Mīnākshi temple, Madurai, Nayak period, 17th century A.D.

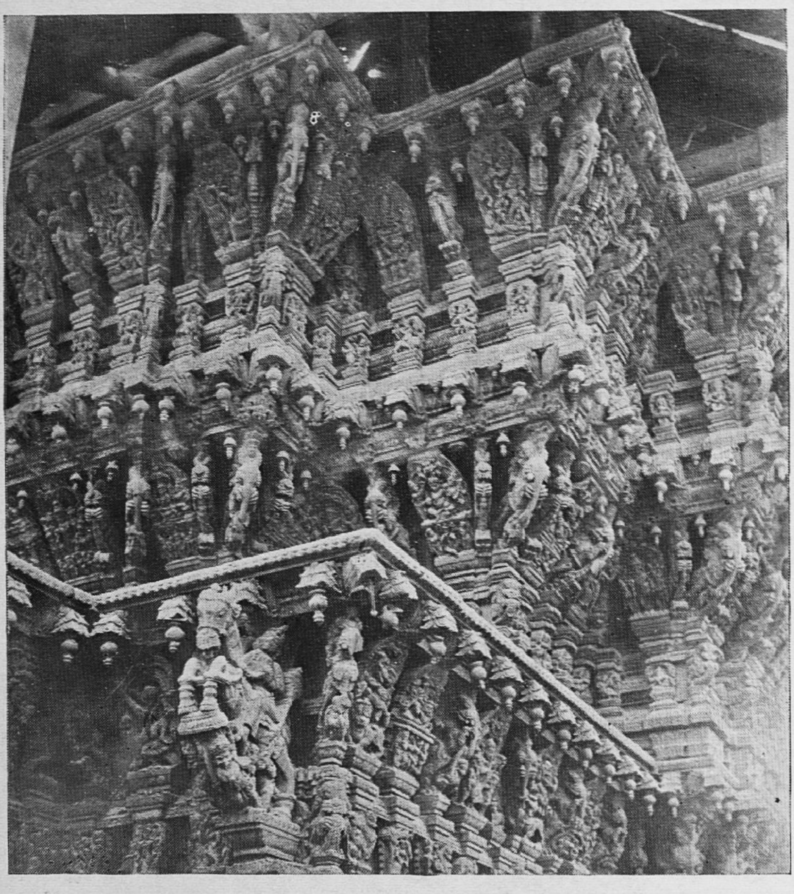




106. Gaṇēsa, wood carving, now in the Government Museum, Madras
Nayak period, 17th century A.D.



107. Subrahmaṇya, wood carving, now in the Government Museum, Madras, Nayak period, 17th century A.D.



108. A view of wood carvings in the temple car Alwartirunagari, District Tirunelveli, about 17th century A.D.



109. Bhavani, painting in a sub-shrine of the Śiva Temple, Panamalai, District South Arcot, Pallava period, 8th century A.D.



110. Dancing girl, painting on a pillar in the Cave Temple, Sittannavasal District Trichy, Pandya period, 9th century A.D.



111. A Celestial Being, painting on the ceiling of the Cave Sittannavasal Temple, District Trichy, Pandya period, 9th century A.D.



112. Dancing girl, painting in the inner enclosure of the Great Temple, Tanjore, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



113. Portraits, probably representing Rājarāja and Karuvūrdēvar, painting in the inner enclosure of the Great Temple, Tanjore, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



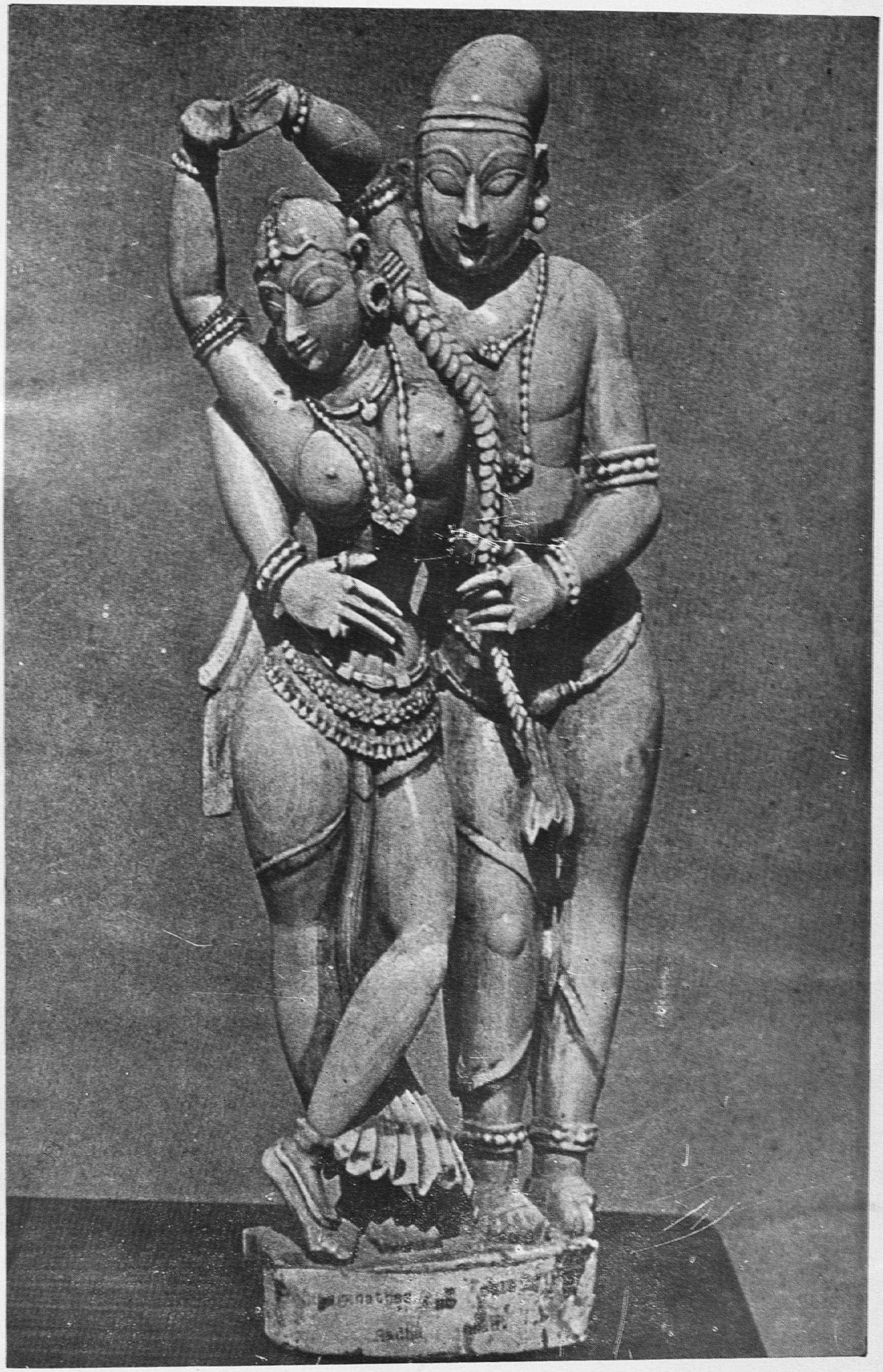
114. Portraits, painting in the inner enclosure of the Great Temple, Tanjore, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



115. Saint Sundaramoorthy. painting in the inner enclosure of the Great Temple, Tanjore, District Tanjore, Chola period, 11th century A.D.



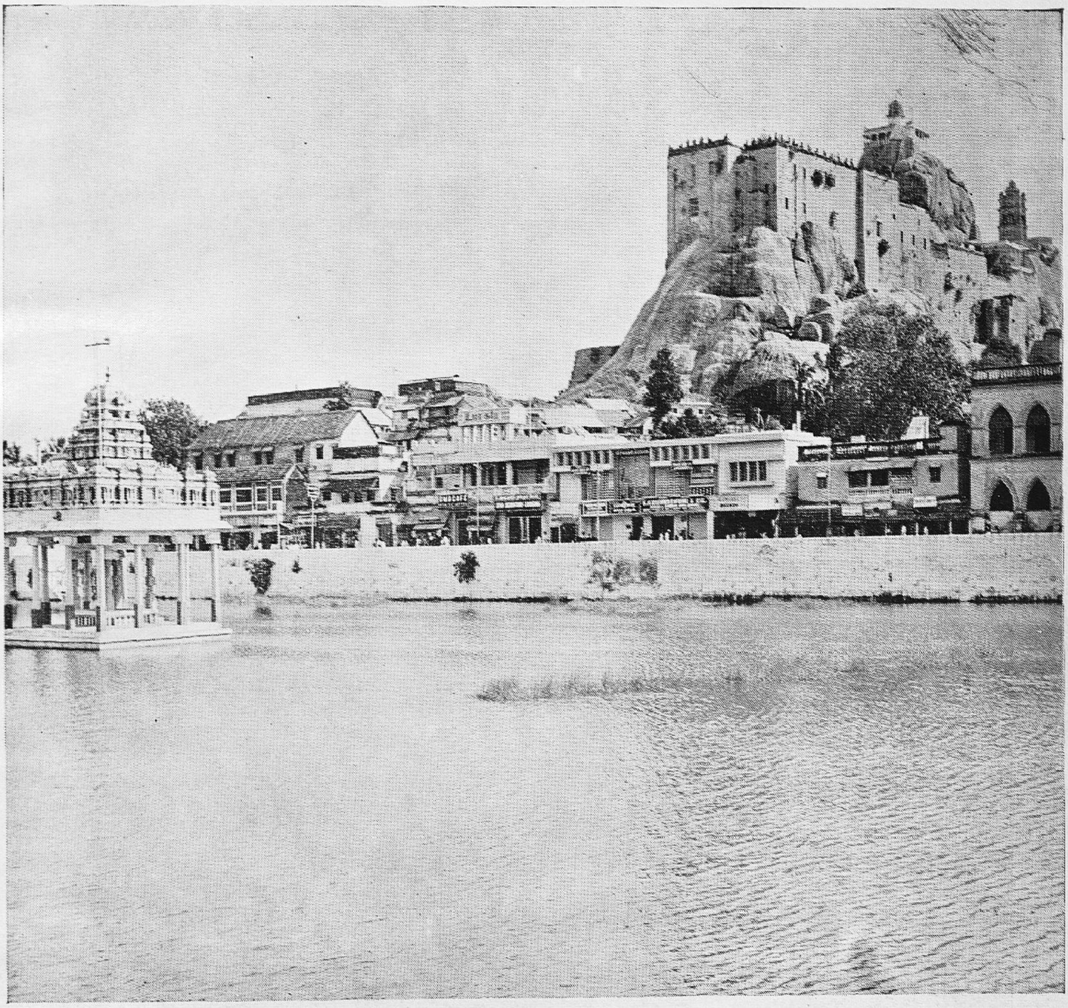
116. Marriage of Śiva with Pārvati, painting on the ceiling of a maṇḍapa in the Mīnākshi temple, Madurai, District Madurai, Nayak period, 17th century A.D.



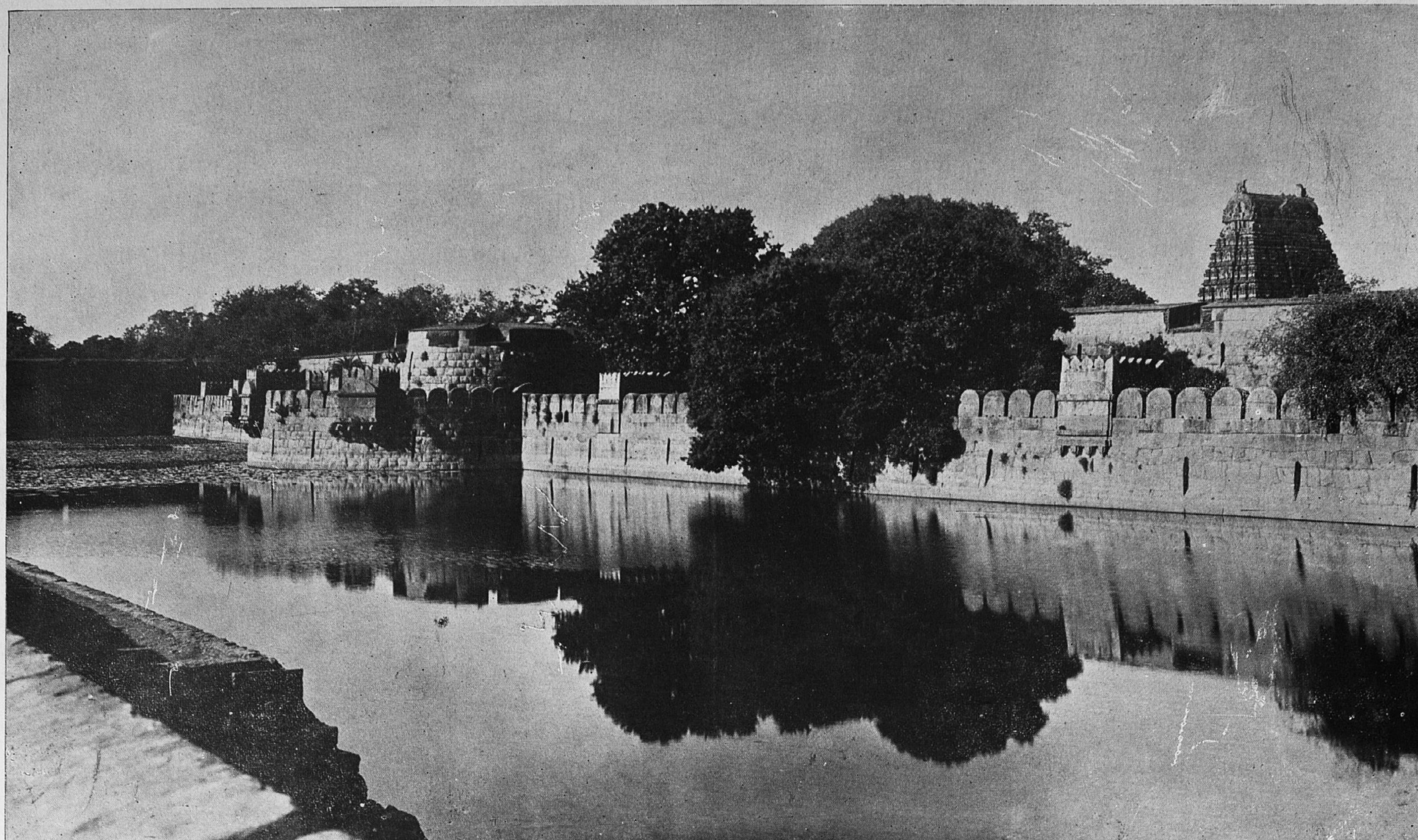
117. Ivory carving, in the Raṅganātha Temple, Srirangam, District Trichy, Nayak period, 17th century A.D.



118. A view of the Śivagaṅga Tank, in the temple of Naṭarāja, Chidambaram, District South Arcot.



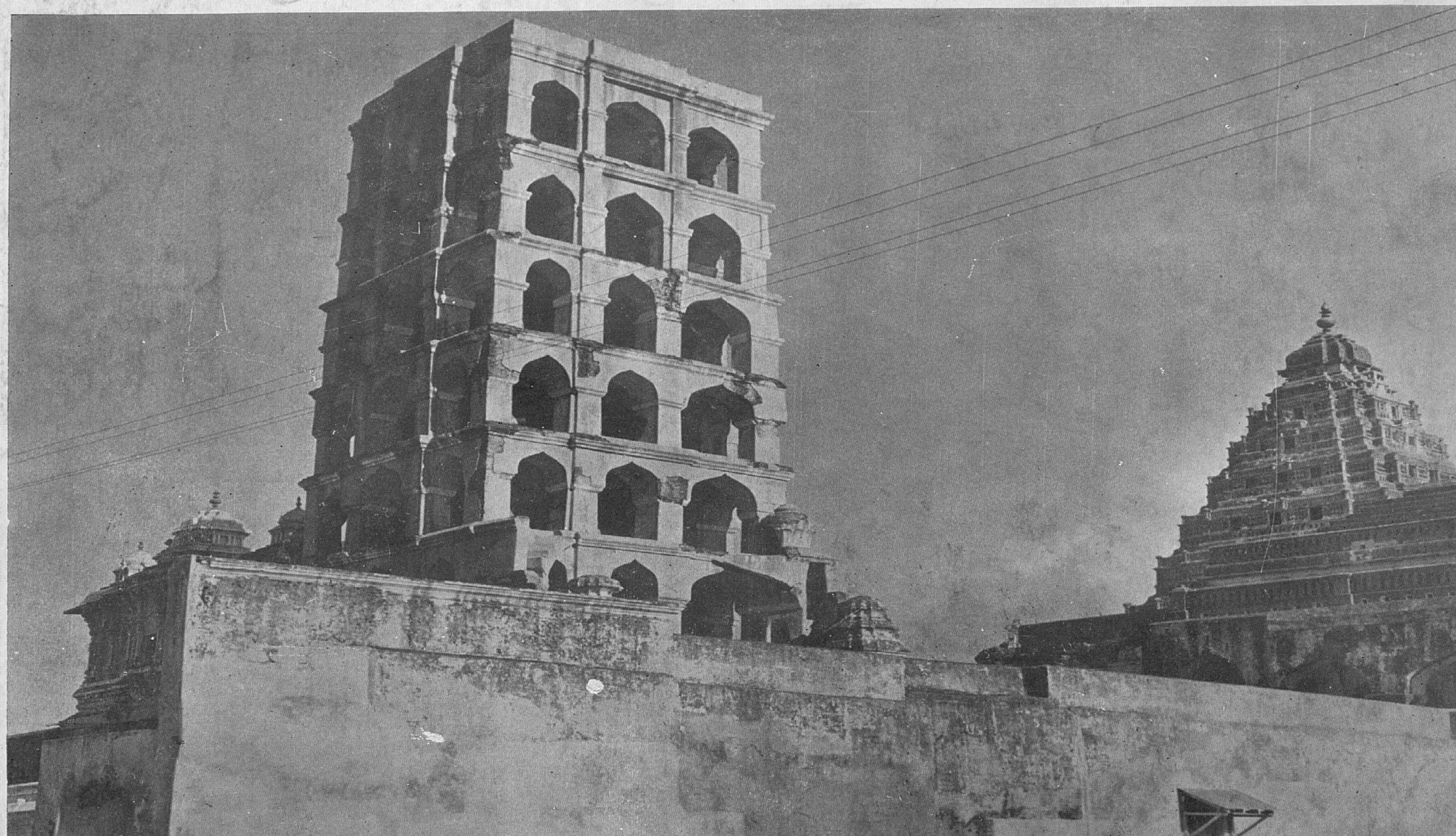
119. A view of Teppakkulam, Trichy, District Trichy.



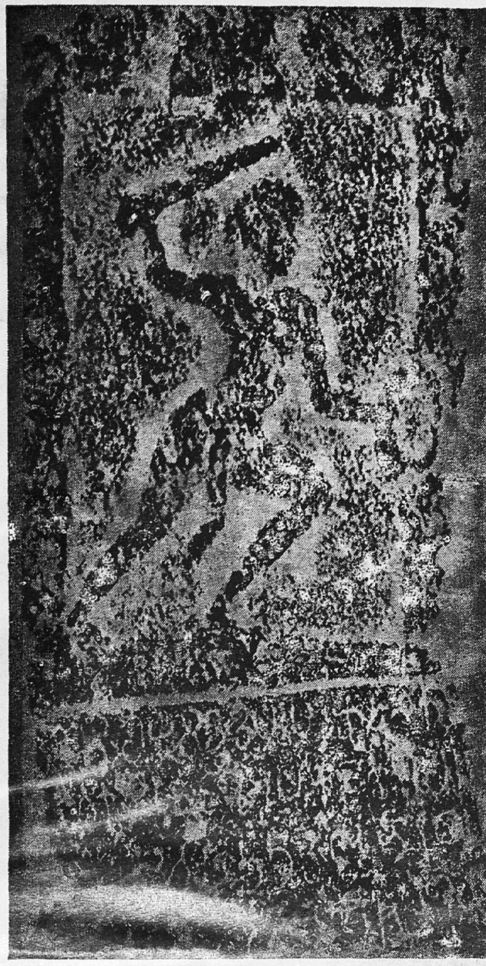
120. A view of Fort Vellore, District North Arcot, about 16th century A.D.



121. A view of the Fort Gingee, District South Arcot, about 16th century A.D.



122. Palace and Watch Tower, Tanjore, District Tanjore,
N[illegible] period, [illegible]6th century A.D.



123. Two Hero-stones, Irulappatti, District Dharmapuri, 5th century A.D.

